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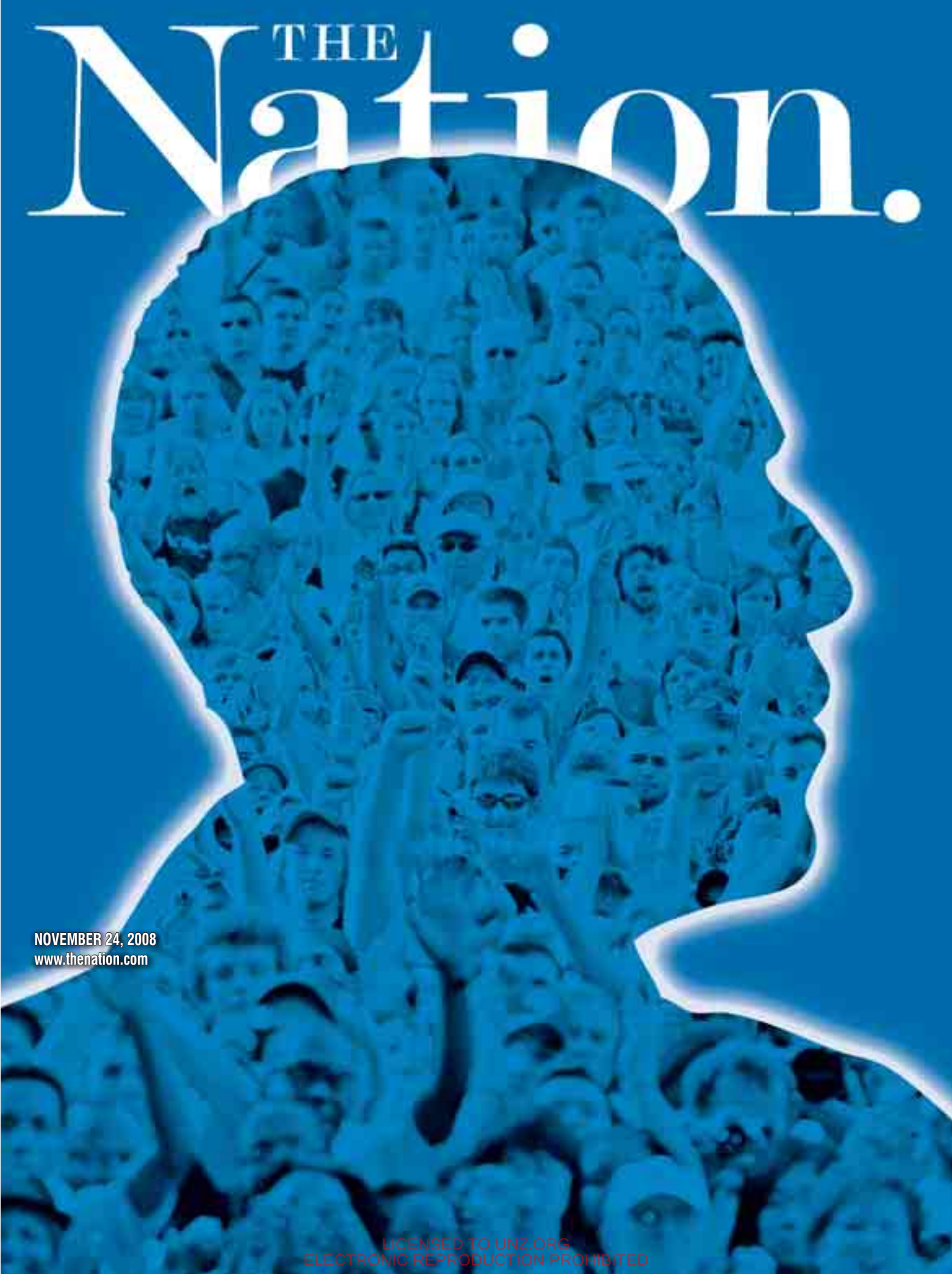

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Letters

Votes & Smokes, Folks

Glendale, Calif.
When I opened my *Nation* and saw the "Steal Back Your Vote" comic [Oct. 27], I blurted out, "Fucking excellent!" And for me, unlike Sarah "God Bless Exxon" Palin, that includes a "g." I also found it amusing that there was an advertising insert for an addictive drug (tobacco). As a downhill skate racer I'm used to marketing of all kinds everywhere, including on our boards and clothes. My new leathers are unusual in that they say JuanCole.com.
Scott Peer

Obama on Healthcare

Hollandale, Minn.
The wonderfully informative Trudy Lieberman left out one piece of information in "Can Obama Reform Healthcare?" [Oct. 27]. Will Obama keep his promise to cut off the Medicare overpayments used to finance the Medicare Advantage plans, or does he consider them "a whole system of institutions" that can't be disturbed?
Mary Milliron

Lieberman Replies

New York City
Milliron is right. In the interest of brevity, I did not address the issue of extra payments to Medicare Advantage plans, which allow seniors to get their hospital, doctor and drug benefits in one plan. Nor did I address a particular type of Medicare Advantage plan called the private-fee-for-service plan, which lures seniors in with goodies such as eye exams and gym memberships. When seniors get sick, they find that the fine print often says they have to pay 20 percent for chemotherapy drugs or 30 percent for oxygen. Congress authorized these plans when it passed the prescription drug benefit legislation in 2003 as a way to hasten the privatization of Medicare, arguing that they would be more efficient and save the government money.

Instead they have *cost* the government money. The Commonwealth Fund, a New York City research and philanthropic organization, recently released two reports. One shows that, on average, the government is paying Medicare Advantage plans 12.4 percent more than it costs to provide the same coverage to people under the traditional Medicare program. The total of overpayments this year comes to $8.5 billion. The government is overpaying private-fee-for-service plans, which are used by some 2 million beneficiaries, 16.6 percent. These extra payments come to almost $2.5 billion for the year.

That's a lot to be paying for gym memberships and eye exams, a point Barack Obama made in the third debate when he said, "It doesn't help seniors get any better. It's not improving our healthcare system. It's just a giveaway." Congress cut some of the fat out of the extra payments this summer. They will be about 15 percent less at the beginning of 2010.

Milliron's question is the right one to ask. Will President Obama take a hard stand against the insurers who sell Medicare Advantage plans and who understandably want to continue getting the extra government handouts, or will he be a strong leader on this issue, working with Congress to make sure that insurance companies are paid no more than it costs the government to provide the same coverage directly to seniors? Expect a big fight on this one.
Trudy Lieberman

Atheist-Based Initiative?

Woodcliff Lake, N.J.
Thank you so much for Ronald Aronson's "All Ye Unfaithful" [Oct. 27]. I've often felt uncomfortable about candidates having to "sell" themselves by proclaiming that they are churchgoing Christians. I am a spiritual person who is active with social- and political-justice issues, but I don't consider myself religious, and I have no desire to be part of a congregation.

(continued on page 24)

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Ready, Set, Obama

On November 4, the voters gave a resounding, nearly deafening answer to the needling question of pundits who have spent the past two years asking, Is America ready for a black President?

Yes, it is.

Of course, it is possible to overstate the significance of this moment for the condition of black Americans. But it is not possible to overstate its sweetness—and the pure, unadulterated joy that has come from tasting it. The satisfaction is all the greater because three states of the former Confederacy—its erstwhile capital, Virginia, Florida and, it appears, North Carolina—will give their electoral votes to a black man. The word "union" seems stronger and more apt than ever.

EDITORIAL

Of the some 40 million white Americans who voted for Barack Obama, many no doubt set aside their racial prejudices for the sake of their economic future; many others, however, actively chose to renounce them, and the youngest cohort of voters, who voted for Obama in overwhelming numbers, showed they are accustomed to and enthusiastic about a genuinely multiracial society in a way no previous generation has been. Talk of Obama as a "postracial" candidate was always misplaced, but his election does bring us closer to the dream articulated by so many black leaders, all the way back to Frederick Douglass, of a society that has moved beyond race not because racism is ignored but because there is greater opportunity and equality.

This election certainly doesn't mean racism is dead. Obama was an extraordinary candidate with enormous political talents running in a climate warm to Democrats, against the candidate of a party whose incumbent president boasts an approval rating of less than 20 percent, the lowest ever recorded of any American president. Those were Obama's built-in advantages. His blackness (and his "funny name") was something he had to overcome, and he did so brilliantly. In the end, his unique promise of racial reconciliation—from a man whose very existence, whose very blood, testifies to its possibility—worked.

People came together, even in Republican strongholds like Indiana and Virginia, narrowly but clearly rejecting the McCain/Palin message about Obama's purported terrorist connections and his alleged detachment from the "pro-America" parts of the country. John McCain was gracious in defeat, but nonetheless it is worth relishing the failure of his campaign's basest tactics, a veritable garage sale of musty culture-war tropes: resentment of "elitists" and fears about race (Nixon); hostility toward issues and a heavy reliance on personality (Reagan); and blatant, almost caricatured appeals to reactionary populism and social conservatives (George W. Bush). That these maneuvers now appear to have backfired heralds a new beginning in American politics. The culture war may not be over, but conservatives must face the fact that over the long term they cannot win it.

It is also worth taking a moment to savor the fact that voters rebuffed McCain's attempt to stoke their fears by calling Obama a "socialist" because he believes in "spreading the wealth." The last few decisive weeks of the election really did pit two opposing economic ideologies against each other: the Reaganite catechism of cuts to social programs, tax cuts for the wealthy and deregulation against a center-left vision of social investment, access to healthcare, re-regulation and that dreaded word, redistribution. Ideas have consequences, as conservatives like to say, and the consequences of Reaganism have finally proved to be so blatantly disastrous that we have the rare opportunity to build popular support for a progressive governing agenda. That six in

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COVER DESIGN BY JOSÉ CHICAS & GENE CASE/AVENGING ANGELS; ILLUSTRATIONS BY GENE CASE & STEPHEN KLING/AVENGING ANGELS AND KAREN CALDICOTT

VOLUME 287, NUMBER 17, NOVEMBER 24, 2008
PRINTED NOVEMBER 5

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INTERNET: Selections from the current issue become available Thursday night at www.thenation.com.

Printed on 100% recycled 40% post-consumer acid- and chlorine-free paper, in the USA.

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NEWS & ANALYSIS

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The Nation rejoices

NATION POLL

Presidential priorities

NEW BLOG

"State of Change"

ten voters told exit pollsters the economy was their number-one concern, most of whom voted for Obama, should be read as the repudiation of the free-market agenda that it is.

As the conversation turns to the question of a "mandate," nearly everyone concedes that Obama has one, but there's already disagreement about what it consists of. He won with a very broad coalition behind him—from the civil rights establishment to the Beltway establishment; from antiwar activists to Colin Powell. The pressure to govern from the center, to try not to alienate the establishment, will be massive. But as in 1933, when FDR took office, the people yearn for bold leadership—and the crisis we are in requires it.

FDR, we must remember, did not run as a radical reformer but was compelled to take dramatic action because of the great traumas and powerful movements around him. The Great Depression, combined with pressure from the popular social movements working outside the administration (including the empowered unions of that time), pushed him to carry out bolder reforms. There's a powerful lesson in this history for our time.

The small "d" democratic movement that helped elect Barack Obama—the millions of volunteers and organizers, and 2 million-plus small donors—will play a key role in forging a progressive agenda under his administration. We will need this broad and energized grassroots base to overcome the timid incrementalists, the forces of money and power, that are obstacles to change. With solid majorities in both houses of Congress, the Democrats are poised to provide the Obama administration with crucial backup. Historically, though, we know the Democratic Party's finest moments have come when it was spurred into action by movements on the outside.

This is where *The Nation*, along with other independent and progressive forces, can come into play. Unmortgaged to any economic interest or political power, we will continue to make bold proposals, ferret out the truth, expose corruption and abuse of power, and hold our politicians accountable. Working with allies—in unions, social justice movements, independent media and key organizations like the Apollo Alliance, the Campaign for America's Future, the Institute for Policy Studies and the Economic Policy Institute—we will strive to inject new, timely ideas into the democratic arena. Progressives in the Senate and the House, many grouped around the Progressive Caucus, can provide leadership and a public forum for these ideas.

While we may not agree with everything President Obama does, we recognize that he has the capacity to be a transformative president. The change he can bring will be most lasting and profound if the motto of his organizing campaign—"Respect. Empower. Include."—embodies the spirit of his administration. That was, in essence, the pledge he made election night when he said, "I will never forget who this victory truly belongs to. It belongs to you."

We, the People

In his prophetic turn-of-the-century treatise *The Souls of Black Folk*, W.E.B. Du Bois reflected on the experience of being black in America as a constant awareness that others view one as a problem—to be observed, analyzed and

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solved. For black Americans our very self is the object of the slavery question, the miscegenation threat, the Jim Crow solution, the Negro problem, the black family crisis, the welfare dilemma, the crime concern or the nation's racial scar. It is difficult to live as the object of this amused contempt and pity.

When Barack Obama was elected as the first black president of the United States, African-Americans became the solution instead of the problem. For many black folks, Obama's victory has momentarily healed the double consciousness that is an ordinary part of our lives. To be a citizen in a democracy is to be not only the ruled but also the ruler, to not only submit to law but to craft it, to not only die for your country but to live fully in it. In this moment, we are citizens.

We the people, who tilled the soil and cleared the forests and harvested the crops for no compensation. We the people, who endured the abortion of Reconstruction and carried the weight of Jim Crow. We the people, who swung from Southern trees and stood on the front lines of foreign wars. We the

Noted.

LONDON CALLING: Perhaps restrained by an exaggerated sense of its influence on the American electorate, the BBC refused to project a winner until nearly 4 AM. But when it did, the sense of relief, and the hope that America's long national nightmare might really be over, was almost as strong here in Britain as in the United States. For the chattering classes, the US election became a matter of obsessive interest—indeed, for the past week the BBC's probing examination of swing voters in Virginia and likely turnout in Ohio left little room for the mundane bank failures, tragic knife slayings and looming by-elections. There were occasional complaints from resentful Little Englanders, but most people here seemed to share *Guardian* columnist Jonathan Freedland's view that "the US election is our business" too.

So when the votes were finally counted, the universal European wish to usher George W. Bush into the dustbin of history made for widespread jubilation. If the left-leaning *Guardian* was triumphant, consider the conservative *Daily Telegraph*, whose editorialist welcomed Obama's opportunity to "transform America's view of itself and the world's view of America, which has rarely been more reviled." Even the *Sun*, Rupert Murdoch's resolutely down-market tabloid, declared that "there's no doubt Obama's administration will alter American society for good."

No British politician summoned the eloquence—or the familiarity with American literature—deployed by French politician Jack Lang, Mitterrand's former culture minister, who pronounced Obama "the kind of American we love. His is the America of jazz and Fitzgerald and Faulkner and Kerouac and Kennedy." But the leaders of all three British parties were quick to celebrate a victory that Prime Minister Gordon Brown said would "live in history." Boris Johnson, the tousle-headed Tory mayor of London, endorsed Obama before the election—a popular as well as populist move for the leader of a multiethnic city.

Running underneath all the media frenzy was an undercurrent of envy. "If only OUR elections could be like this," moaned the right-wing *Daily Mail*. On the BBC, anchor David Dimbleby repeatedly wondered at the passionate nature of American political disagreement compared with the far more constrained tone of British debate. Yet the real envy, everywhere echoed but seldom acknowledged, was for the heroic history of the American civil rights movement and the way the quiet persistence of African-Americans made Obama's victory so much more than a partisan or even an ideological triumph. British politics once had a heroic narrative of its own. But Margaret Thatcher killed the British labor movement, and Tony Blair shoveled dirt on its coffin. And there is no one in British politics who shows any sign of bringing that buried legacy back to life. D.D. GUTTENPLAN AND MARIA MARGARONIS

DREAMS FROM HIS FATHERLAND: For most Kenyans, the news of Obama's victory came as anything but a surprise—the newspapers and airwaves have been full of Obama stories for months. Obama's face and fame have been used to sell everything from T-shirts to "Senator" beer. In recent weeks you could listen to "Obama Be Thy Name," written by a local Afro-fusion musician, on the radio and catch *Obama: The Musical* at the Kenyan National Theater. One local paper went so far as to run an editorial titled WHY WE ENDORSE BARACK OBAMA—enough to make a stranger think the contest was being run here rather than 8,000 miles and eight time zones away.

At the University of Nairobi, where I teach, I was struck by what students said they'd taken away from Obama's victory speech and McCain's concession speech—the generosity of spirit and the coming together, which they said was far from the norm here. "In Kenya, if you lose, it's not the person but the tribe. We are still fighting for our tribe," said Gillian Koech, as several of her friends nodded. All the students expressed the hope that Obama will set an example for Kenyans, but they said change will come only if their leaders take the lead. "If I had magic powers I would make people forget Kikuyus and Luos," said Bob Koigi. "Obama's win is a Kenyan win."

And a world win, according to some of their older countrymen. "I'm elated and exhilarated, but I think the greatest part is that the image of the US is totally transformed," said Perez Olindo, a former director of the national parks. Olindo—who, like Obama Sr., went to college in the United States nearly fifty years ago on a pre-independence "airlift"—knew Obama's father when both served in the Ministry of Natural Resources, Tourism and Wildlife. "He was a thinker, analytical," recalls Olindo. When Olindo looks at the young Obama, he sees the same deliberative, focused intelligence that made his father such a good economist. "I know that he's an American and that he will first and foremost promote an American program," he says of the president-elect. "But by virtue of his background he will have a very keen ear for what people elsewhere are saying." And, Olindo adds, "he's already affected the thinking of the world, which is looking more positively at America." KAREN ROTHMYER

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people, who taught our children to read even when the schools had no books. We the people, who worshiped a God of liberation even as we suffered oppression. We the people, who gave America back its highest ideals with our nonviolent struggle against injustice.

We the people are now Americans.

Obama concluded his acceptance speech by talking about a 106-year-old African-American woman named Ann Cooper who voted for him in Atlanta. He told us that the sweep of Mrs. Cooper's life was an indication of the tremendous change our nation has witnessed.

COMMENT

Anna Julia Cooper happens to be the name of a black feminist foremother, born in 1858 during slavery, who became the fourth black woman in history to earn a doctoral degree. She died in 1964, the year of the Civil Rights Act. In her life, this Anna Cooper also saw tremendous change. Cooper famously wrote in her turn-of-the-twentieth-century treatise, *A Voice From the South*, that the full freedom and equality of black women was critical to American democracy because "Only the BLACK WOMAN can say 'when and where I enter, in the quiet, undisputed dignity of my womanhood, without violence and without suing or special patronage, then and there the whole *Negro race enters with me*.'"

When Obama told the story of his Ann Cooper, I understood again why his victory means so much to me. Barack Obama has taken a seat at the table of power, and he has invited all of us to come along. He could not have won without us. African-Americans saved Obama's candidacy in the South Carolina primary and delivered North Carolina and Virginia to him on Tuesday night. We are equal, not junior, partners in this historic victory. He has entered, and we have come along with him.

After decades of being ignored by white Democratic presidential candidates who wrote off the South as hopelessly red, black Americans below the Mason-Dixon line have been brought new vigor by Barack Obama's candidacy. Obama did not take the black vote for granted. He fought hard to earn it. Urban radio became a nonstop source of election coverage and get-out-the-vote activism. Black college football games were transformed into voter registration drives. Church mothers pinned Obama buttons to their Sunday best suits. Hip-hop designers styled new Obama fashions and produced Obama-inspired music.

Obama also won with the largest share of the popular vote of any Democrat since LBJ; he earned a percentage of the white vote that rivaled Clinton and Carter; he earned more than two-thirds of the Latino vote. His victory is stunning in part because he has been a racially forthright Democratic candidate. His campaign did not have to spit on Sister Souljah or promise to end welfare. Instead, he launched his campaign in Illinois by invoking Lincoln, who despite his own racial bigotry, called on the nation to unify in the cause of defeating slavery. In Selma Obama defined himself as part of the Joshua generation, those who will help America cross into Martin Luther King Jr.'s mountaintop vision of the Promised Land. In Philadelphia he paused in the midst of a hard-fought primary to help us navigate the difficult terrain of America's racial history and begin to build some common vocabulary for talking to one another across our differences.

Barack Obama's presidency will not deal a death blow to racism. Racial inequality still affects the quality of the air we breathe, the quality of our health, the likelihood of being erroneously shot by police, the likelihood of being poor, of having little education and of being unemployed. Race is sticky and racism is real. Being black will still mean living poorer and dying younger.

Obama does not free us of these burdens, but he does offer a new possibility for America's future. The Obama coalition is multiracial and intergenerational. It is led by women and by men. It stretches from North Carolina to New York, California to Colorado. The Obama coalition does not mean the end of racist attitudes or structural inequality, but it does mean that there are millions of Americans who have found common cause that moves beyond our old divisions and calls on new sensibilities. We have a long way to go before we get anywhere near that more perfect union that Obama imagined in Philadelphia, but the work has begun in earnest.

MELISSA HARRIS-LACEWELL

Melissa Harris-Lacewell, an associate professor of politics and African-American studies at Princeton University, is completing her latest book, Sister Citizen: A Text for Colored Girls Who've Considered Politics When Being Strong Isn't Enough.

Calvin Trillin, Deadline Poet

Race in America, November 5, 2008

The curse is not over. There's plenty to do.
That curse is so strong we may never break through.
But now, at this moment, we cling to the theme
Set forth by the man who said, "I have a dream…"

The Big Sweep

Barack Obama secured the presidency with the highest percentage of the national popular vote won by a Democrat since Lyndon Johnson in 1964. He also gained a wide margin of victory in the Electoral College. But his governing majority was secured in the contests for the Senate and House, where Democrats made significant advances. Indeed, the Congressional results confirm that the 2008 election was not just a personal triumph for Obama. It was a Democratic sweep of the sort rarely seen in recent decades.

COMMENT

The scope of the victory may not be known for weeks, as key Senate contests produced results so close that recounts could be required in as many as four states. In Minnesota, for instance, on the day after the election only a few hundred

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votes—out of 2.9 million—separated Democratic challenger Al Franken from Republican incumbent Norm Coleman in a contentious contest for Paul Wellstone's old seat. At the least, Democrats will move from a narrow 51-to-49 Senate majority to a comfortable 56-to-44 advantage. That means they will no longer have to defer to Democrat-turned-independent Joe Lieberman, who backed John McCain for president. It also means that, although Obama is unlikely to enjoy a filibuster-proof majority of sixty Democratic senators, he will be able to use his bully pulpit to appeal to moderate Republicans—like Maine's Susan Collins, who was re-elected on a promise to work across party lines—for support of needed reforms, a more responsible approach to foreign affairs and economic policies strong enough to meet the challenges posed by a deepening recession.

The new Senate will be marginally more progressive. New Mexico's Tom Udall and his Colorado cousin Mark Udall, who as members of the House both voted against going to war in Iraq, against the Patriot Act and against most of the Bush administration's misguided economic policies, will replace Republicans who were steady Bush backers. North Carolina's Kay Hagan—who highlighted her differences with Republican incumbent Elizabeth Dole's votes in favor of the administration's free-trade agenda—will expand a loose-knit Senate fair-trade caucus that grew substantially when Democrats took control of the chamber two years ago. And New Hampshire's Jeanne Shaheen, while hardly a raging liberal, is likely to be a solid ally for Obama, which John Sununu, the Republican senator she replaces, would never have been.

The same will be true of Virginia's Mark Warner, the keynote speaker at the Democratic National Convention, who replaces relatively moderate Republican John "No Relation" Warner. On social issues in particular, the new Democratic senators, all pro-choice and sympathetic to gay rights, are aligned with Obama, and that should make it easier to win confirmation of his Supreme Court picks.

The Democrats who won Senate seats this year know they benefited from Obama's appeal and his savvy campaign. Instead of running away from a presidential candidate who gave up early on Western and Southern states, challengers in those regions could count on Obama to keep the top of the ticket in contention and to boost turnout among young voters, as well as African-Americans in the South and Latinos in the West.

Obama was perhaps even more of a help to his party's House candidates. Democrats who won seats in GOP-leaning districts in 2006, such as New Hampshire's Carol Shea-Porter and Wisconsin's Steve Kagen, held on to them with relative ease as the presidential nominee spent heavily on voter registration and turnout drives that aided down-ticket candidates. And Obama's get-out-the-vote crusade surely helped progressives like New Mexico's Martin Heinrich take Republican seats. The Democratic surge was not enough to win what could have been the sweetest Congressional victory: Michele Bachmann, a Minnesota Republican who launched into a McCarthyite rant on MSNBC's *Hardball*, survived by a narrow margin. But Virginia Democrat Tom Perriello came within recount range of another crude conservative, Virgil Goode, who made headlines two years ago griping about the election of the first Muslim Congressman, Minnesota Democrat Keith Ellison.

Perhaps the best news is that many of the roughly two dozen new Democrats in the House arrive as experienced reformers, like former Common Cause director Chellie Pingree of Maine and economic populists like New York's Dan Maffei and North Carolina's Larry Kissell. Some, like Pingree, are likely to become leaders of an expanded Congressional Progressive Caucus. Others will work closely with the emerging bloc of fair-trade Democrats willing to break with the party's House leadership to protect workers' rights and the environment here and abroad.

House Democrats will have to prod Obama, as should their Senate peers. Certainly there will be a desire to aid the new president. But Obama and a more Democratic Congress arrive in Washington as part of a broad electoral rejection of regressive Republican rule. They are charged with a responsibility to change the way America is governed. Essential to that change must be a restoration of the system of checks and balances that was so diminished during eight years of the Bush/Cheney interregnum.

JOHN NICHOLS

Marital Discord

COMMENT

Amid the honks and cheers of joy in the Castro and West Hollywood, there are quiet signs of anxiety and, as state election results come in, a growing sense of anguish. Something is not right in the Golden State. Even as Californians gave 61 percent of their vote to Barack Obama, a majority of them, 52 percent, voted to discriminate against another kind of minority—gays and lesbians. For a brief window that began in the bridal month of June, California queers had the right to marry, thanks to a state Supreme Court ruling, and some 18,000 same-sex couples said "I do." Proposition 8—a ballot initiative that would amend the state Constitution to define marriage as between a man and a woman—now says "You can't!"

As I write, the results for the second most expensive campaign in the country after the presidency are not official. According to the No on 8 campaign, as many as 3 million to 4 million absentee and provisional ballots have yet to be counted, and gay activists are rightly refusing to concede until they are. But there is little reason to expect that those votes will tip the scales.

Other numbers paint an even grimmer picture. If exit polls are to be believed, some 70 percent of African-Americans voted Yes on 8, as did 52 percent of Latinos and 49 percent of Asians; each of these demographics went heavily for Obama, blacks by a 94-to-6 margin. Los Angeles County, heavily minority, went 50-50 on Prop 8. These results have shocked gay activists, who knew from earlier polls that black voters favored Prop 8, but they were seeing much smaller margins, closer to 50 percent.

The easy, dangerous explanation for this gap, and one already tossed around by some white gay liberals in the bitter aftermath, is that people of color are not so secretly homophobic. But a more complicated reckoning—one that takes into account both the organizing successes of the Christian right and the

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failures of the gay movement—will have to take place if activists want a different result next time. First, there's the matter of the Yes on 8 coalition's staggering disinformation campaign. Ad after ad told voters that without Prop 8, their churches would be forced to perform same-sex unions and be stripped of their tax-exempt status; that schools would teach their children to practice homosexuality; and, perhaps most effective, that a smiling Barack Obama had said, "I'm not in favor of gay marriage." This last bit went out in a flier by the Yes on 8 campaign, targeting black households.

Obama indeed does not favor gay marriage, as he said during the primary, but he also came out emphatically against Prop 8, as a late TV ad by the No on 8 campaign emphasized. Mainstream outlets like the *Los Angeles Times* meticulously countered the other lies as well, but too little, too late. They had taken root in many communities of color, and once lodged, proved difficult to dislodge.

This was always the intent of the Yes on 8 campaign. For years, the California Christian-right apparatus, long hampered by nativism and racism, had been unable to make inroads into the state's brown, yellow and black populations—a demographic gold mine in a state that is more than 50 percent minority and growing. Prop 8 may prove to be their gold rush. From the beginning they bought up ad space in Chinese, black, Spanish and Korean media; they hosted massive rallies for ethnic Christians. The Sunday before election day, I went to Los Angeles City Hall for the most celebratory, most diverse rally I have ever attended; it was organized by Yes on 8 Chinese advocates.

But it's only in an organizing vacuum that bald lies and racial pandering find room to thrive. Gay activists, by most accounts, were simply outmaneuvered. Andrea Shorter, a black lesbian volunteer for the No on 8 campaign, told me that the outreach to the African-American community began in earnest a week ago. "What's happened is that there's been an outcry from communities of color, including African-American communities, who say, 'Include us!' Now there's a GOTV strategy, but for some it seems last minute," she said in an interview before the election. Another No on 8 activist, Karin Wang, told me at the City Hall rally that when Asian Pacific Islander groups went to buy ads in Chinese and Korean newspapers, they were informed that Yes on 8 had been renting space for weeks.

Many gay leaders, especially those less central to the No on 8 efforts, told me that such disorder was endemic to gay efforts. "The campaign doesn't seem to have got its act together until a few weeks ago. It wasn't clicking. It wasn't raising money. It didn't have good ads on the air," says Rafael Mandelman of the San Francisco Harvey Milk LGBT Democratic Club. He laments, in particular, the absence of gay couples in No on 8 materials, which mainly depicted straight celebrities and elected officials. That's a choice that was strangely mirrored by the Yes on 8 campaign, which put not antigay hate but heterosexual love—its sanctity and the threat to it—at the center of its message. At the City Hall rally on Sunday, the loudest cheers were for a young, straight Chinese couple who had exchanged their vows in front of the crowd. Their marriage, they hoped, would be made "safe" by Prop 8. It certainly was celebrated.

RICHARD KIM

Antitheft Devices

2008 will go down as the year voting rights activists finally learned how to push back and keep a rotten electoral system acceptably honest.

COMMENT

For all the anxiety about possible meltdowns—machine failures, voter challenges, large-scale disenfranchisement and outright vote theft—the election went off remarkably smoothly. And the credit for that has to go to the armies of lawyers, voting rights advocates and policy institutes that challenged suspect laws and attempts at dirty electioneering, monitored every move made by election officials and party operatives, and either mitigated or headed off a multitude of potential catastrophes on election day.

None of this, of course, should be an acceptable substitute for durable election reform. It is still far too difficult to register to vote—the biggest problem in this year of Obama-inspired mass participation. Local election officials are still given far too much discretion to purchase lousy voting machines and too little guidance on how to ensure that the supply of those machines will meet demand. Partisan Republicans, inspired by Karl Rove and a heavily politicized Justice Department, had far too much leeway in their efforts to suppress new voters and promote their bogus campaign against the nonexistent problem of individual voter fraud.

Still, the lesson of November 4 is that election protection works. Thanks to the unstinting legal challenges to Republican dirty tricks, the courts rejected pre-emptive attempts to challenge tens of thousands of eligible voters in Colorado, Ohio and other swing states. The activist groups did not sit back as the usual crop of deceptive fliers and e-mails popped up urging Democrats to vote on Wednesday instead of Tuesday. They made their own robocalls to counter the disinformation, hiring Danny Glover to put out a message heard in more than 400,000 households.

In just about every precinct in the land, lawyers were present to make sure paper ballots were in plentiful supply in case of machine breakdown; that those ballots were not relegated to provisional status unless the law required it; and that voters unable to have their vote counted immediately knew what to do to prove their eligibility.

There were problems, of course, notably on college campuses, where lines were often outrageously long—up to four hours at Penn State, two or three hours at dozens of others—and students were vulnerable to challenges because they had registered at their campus address, not at home.

The measure of this election, though, was in how these problems were addressed. Under other circumstances, Virginia Tech might have become to 2008 what Kenyon College in Ohio was to 2004—a flash point in a key swing state with horrendous lines created by a mixture of bureaucratic incompetence and political ill will. The local registrar of voters in Montgomery County, Virginia, certainly made things as hard as he could—moving the precinct to a location six miles from campus, on a remote, unmarked country road half a mile from the nearest parking. Student groups and national organizations like Rock the Vote responded, however, by bringing in buses to shuttle students to and from the site. The waits were long—up to three hours—but the students' votes got cast.

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Virginia as a whole might have been in line to become the next Florida, not so much because of political interference but because the state—unused to being in the eye of the presidential storm—simply could not cope. On election morning, there were so many machine breakdowns across Virginia that leaders of the Election Protection coalition—put together by the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, the NAACP and other groups—pressed state officials to keep the polls open for an extra two hours in the evening.

As the day wore on, however, it became clear that many of the problems had been solved relatively quickly—in large part thanks to the presence of partisan and nonpartisan lawyers. One roving Election Protection volunteer in northern Virginia, Paul Kugelman, said he had gone to several precincts where there were reports of trouble, only to find the problems had been solved by the time he got there. "In some places, there were more lawyers than voters," he said.

Clearly, we have come a long way. The Florida debacle in 2000 took everyone by surprise, while in 2004 the Republicans largely outplayed their opposition. Ben Jealous of the NAACP perhaps summed up this year's response best. "If we had had in 2000 what we have now," he said, "it would have been a very different election." It shouldn't take an army of lawyers to guarantee a fair process, but if that is what it takes, at least we now know how it should be done. ANDREW GUMBEL

Andrew Gumbel, a British reporter and writer based in Los Angeles, is the author of Steal This Vote: Dirty Elections and the Rotten History of Democracy in America *(Nation Books).*

Courage in Ohio

On the last Saturday in October, the president of the Laborers' International Union took the stage in a packed labor hall in Cleveland and rattled off the ways Barack Obama was just like all the white guys in the room.

"He looks like us, he thinks like us and he works like us," Terry O'Sullivan shouted. "And he's going to fight for us. That's why we're going to elect Barack Obama."

COMMENT

The crowd cheered, many of them laughing as they clapped. It was an audacious, maybe even outrageous, declaration of support—and it was exactly what many of them needed to hear. O'Sullivan was a middle-aged working stiff with a face redder than a beet as he assured his fellow laborers that not only could they vote for an African-American, they could pick up their campaign packets and canvass their own neighborhoods, too.

"You didn't join a labor union for social issues," he said. "You joined a labor union because you care about workers, and so does Barack Obama."

O'Sullivan knew exactly what he was doing, and why. For months, pundits had been insisting that these were the men who would abandon the Democratic candidate in droves because Obama was too different, too not-like-them. Increasingly, Ohio was a battleground not just in the presidential race but in kitchens and job sites across the state. Families were divided, often along generational lines, and longtime friendships were fraying. As one union activist in his 70s told me in July, "I'm hearing things come out of brothers' mouths that are breaking my heart." His blue eyes pooled as he added, "We did an internal poll of our union, and the results were so bad we didn't release them."

What O'Sullivan did, loudly and publicly, was the same thing an increasing number of private citizens had been doing quietly for months, one difficult conversation at a time. As the campaign progressed and it became clear that race was a lingering problem in some pockets of Ohio, brand-new activists were being born. Outrage begot courage in even the most timid of hearts. An uncle used a racial epithet, a best friend insisted Obama was a Muslim, a co-worker forwarded one of the endless loops of e-mail challenging his patriotism, and on the receiving end, patience snapped.

In the past four months, I heard from many readers in Ohio who wanted to let me know they were initiating some of the hardest conversations they'd ever had with people they love.

One woman with a nervous voice called me in September at my desk in the newsroom just to say that she had finally told her father, "Stop."

"He said he wouldn't vote for a black man," she told me. "And I held up my hand and said, Daddy, stop."

She said it was the first time in her forty-six years that she had stood up to her father, and that her knees were trembling after she did it. When I asked her what happened next, she laughed.

"Well, after he got over the shock, we talked. And we're still talking. I don't know if he's going to vote for Obama, but at least he understands now why I will."

That might strike some as a small victory, but one day after the election, it appears that there were enough of these little conquests to move the needle. The country's sudden economic crisis certainly helped Obama in a region already reeling from the downturn, but that alone could not deliver the state of Ohio. The groundwork had already been laid by ordinary people determined to deliver extraordinary change, one tough talk at a time.

In a nation hungry for heroes, Ohio delivered.

CONNIE SCHULTZ

Connie Schultz is a columnist at the Plain Dealer *in Cleveland and author of* …and His Lovely Wife, *a memoir about her husband Sherrod Brown's successful 2006 race for the Senate.*

Studs

Studs Terkel, who died October 31 at 96, has been universally celebrated as a world-class listener. This is ironic, since for the past few years, anyway, Studs couldn't hear worth a damn. But that didn't stop him.

Of course, with his publisher, André Schiffrin, egging him on, Studs invented a new form of history, winning a Pulitzer Prize for his oral history of World War II, *The Good War* (1984), although it could just as easily have been for *Working* or *Hard Times* or any of his other amazing books, including *Talking to Myself*, his self-interview.

(*continued on page 12*)

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Alexander Cockburn

Thank You Mr. Greenspan, Thank You Mr. Bush

A country with a terrible history of racism and racist violence has elected a black president. Looking at the ecstatic crowd in Grant Park, Chicago, the moment Obama was declared the winner, one sees with vivid force that many Americans haven't had much of a chance to feel proud of their country for a long time. Young Americans, particularly blacks and Hispanics, yearned for all the affirmations that the Obama campaign has represented, and their joy was manifest and moving in Grant Park, Times Square and other venues across the country.

Equally striking was the rapidity with which one saw a new zeitgeist flaring into life on all the networks—America is a country eager to stand tall once more in the eyes of other nations. Not the nation of stolen elections, of Guantánamo, of renditions, but the nation electing a black man to the White House. The commentators fell over themselves to repeat the message that America is showing a new face to the world.

What sort of face? I was struck by the first reaction to Obama's victory speech by Rachel Maddow, MSNBC's rapidly rising left-liberal star, who seized on this line: "A new dawn of American leadership is at hand. To those who would tear this world down: we will defeat you."

"I was delighted," Maddow exclaimed, "to hear him say in such blunt terms, 'We will defeat you.'" She went on to snarl against "nihilists," "nuts" and "crazies" seeking "world domination" with all the fervor of a right-wing radio shock jock or, for that matter, Bush or Cheney. Maddow is a Rhodes scholar, after all, so laptop bombardment is programmed in more or less automatically.

Maddow's reflex comment was a salutary reminder that it was only a decade ago that liberalism's laptop bombardiers were hustling Clinton into ordering the bombing of civilian targets in the former Yugoslavia.

Domestically, Alaskans gallantly reaffirmed America's traditional gratitude for the man who brings home the bacon by apparently re-electing Senator Ted Stevens, temporarily inconvenienced by his felony conviction. The wisdom, as yet untested, is that Election 2008 is registering as big a sea change in American politics as did 1932 for the Democrats with FDR and 1964 for them with LBJ. Patrick Buchanan, who helped invent conservative politics in the age of Nixon, said mournfully that the Conservative Revolution is over, and George Bush has been the gravedigger.

In the House the Democrats will have a very big majority, 254 to 173, once again of huge importance in diminishing the Republicans' capacity to fight rearguard battles or sidetrack legislation.

Not surprisingly, the commentators were eager to stress the bipartisan nature of Obama's victory. "His ability to govern," David Gergen said, "will be in his ability to withstand a stampede [by Congress] to the left." Another CNN panelist invoked the mandate given to "the center-right coalition." Obama, should he espouse any genuine effort toward positive change, will be reminded of this supposed mandate many times in the press, as will Nancy Pelosi and her Communist accomplices in the House.

Organized labor put tremendous effort into getting a veto-proof Democratic majority of sixty in the Senate and was disappointed. I'm sure that many in the Democratic high command will heave deep sighs of relief at still having Republican obstructionism to blame when labor's objectives, such as the Employee Free Choice Act, get put on the back burner.

Since 1948 every incoming Democratic president has pledged healthcare reform, and every one of them has been routed by the insurance and pharmaceutical industries. Congress can surely beat off any presidential challenges to the Pentagon budget. Obama has promised early action to close Guantánamo and to end torture and renditions, which will be simple ways of improving the Empire's image. As far as Afghanistan is concerned, the evolving strategy superintended by Gen. David Petraeus seems to be an effort to repeat his bribery of the Sunnis by proposing handsome subsidies to the Taliban's fighters to mend their ways, with negotiations carried forward through Pakistan's ISI. This strategy seems unlikely to succeed. Like the Iraqis, the Afghans want America out.

In terms of political change, one can invoke 1932 and 1964, but the strongest parallel is really with 1960 and John Kennedy, repository of so many youthful hopes. Of course, it wasn't long before reality caught up with the hopes and overtook them, with deepening involvement in Vietnam and the disaster of the Bay of Pigs. There will be similar bruising engagements with reality in the months ahead and prospects of far greater popular alarm and discontent when the full extent of America's weakness becomes apparent.

"I don't know what more we could have done to try to win this election," John McCain said in his farewell remarks. Actually, there was a lot he could have done. He ran an awful campaign. Obama is enveloped in an aura of inevitability, but let us raise a final toast to that vital ingredient, luck. Give me lucky generals, said Napoleon. Never was there a luckier candidate in the timing of economic collapse, the ultimate October surprise, for which I suppose we can really thank Alan Greenspan.

We are in for a season of overstatements. America's racist demons laid to rest? Virginia voted 52 to 47 for Obama, and at the same time voted 64 to 35 for the white Democrat Mark Warner for Senate. Exit polls established that only 39 percent of whites in Virginia backed Obama. As David Swanson remarked on election night, "What put Obama over in Virginia was not the end of racism but the end of support for George W. Bush, whom 72 percent of voters said they disapproved of."

Above all else, November 4 was a day of savage rejection of a sitting president and of unbounded joy at the prospect of his imminent departure. ■

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Katha Pollitt

Sayonara, Sarah

And so we bid farewell to Sarah Palin. How I'll miss her daily presence in my life! The mooseburgers, the wolf hunts, the kids named after bays and sports and trees and airplanes and who did not seem to go to school at all, the winks and blinks, the cute Alaska accent, the witch-hunting pastor and those great little flared jackets, especially the gray stripey one. People say she was a dingbat, but that is just sexist: the woman read everything, she said so herself; her knowledge of geography was unreal—she knew just where to find the pro-America part of the country; and don't forget her keen interest in ancient history! Thanks largely to her, Bill Ayers is now the most famous sixtysomething professor in the country—eat your heart out, Ward Churchill! You can snipe all you want, but she was truly God's gift: to Barack Obama, Katie Couric—notice no one's making fun of America's sweetheart now—Tina Fey and columnists all over America.

She was also a gift to feminism. Seriously. I don't mean she was a feminist—she told Couric she considered herself one, but in a later interview, perhaps after looking up the meaning of the word, coyly wondered why she needed to "label" herself. And I don't mean she had a claim on the votes of feminists or women—why should women who care about equality vote for a woman who wants to take their rights away? Elaine Lafferty, a former editor of *Ms.*, made a splash by revealing in *The Daily Beast* (Tina Brown's new website, for those of you still following the news on paper) that she has been working as a consultant to Palin. In a short but painful piece of public relations called "Sarah Palin's a Brainiac," Lafferty claimed to find in Palin "a mind that is thoughtful, curious, with a discernible pattern of associative thinking and insight," with a "photographic memory," as smart as legendary Senator Sam Ervin, "a woman who knows *exactly* who she is." According to Lafferty, all that stuff about library censorship and rape kits was just "nonsense"—and feminists who held Palin's wish to criminalize abortion against her were Beltway feminist-establishment elitists who shop at Whole Foods when they should be voting against Barack Obama to make the Dems stop taking women for granted.

So the first way Palin was good for feminism is that she helped us clarify what it isn't: feminism doesn't mean voting for "the woman" just because she's female, and it doesn't mean confusing self-injury with empowerment, like the Ellen Jamesians in *The World According to Garp* (I'll vote for the forced-childbirth candidate, *that'll* show Howard Dean!). It isn't just feel-good "you go, girl" appreciation of female moxie, which I cheerfully acknowledge Palin has by the gallon. As I wrote when she was selected, if she were my neighbor I would probably like her—at least until she organized with her fellow Christians to ban abortion at the local hospital, as Palin did in the 1990s. Yes, feminism is about women getting their fair share of power, and that includes the top jobs—but that can't take a back seat to policies that benefit all women: equality on the job and the legal framework that undergirds it, antiviolence, reproductive self-determination, healthcare, education, childcare and so on. Fortunately, women who care about equality get this—dead-enders like the comically clueless Lynn Forester de Rothschild got lots of press, but in the end Obama won the support of the vast majority of women who had supported Hillary Clinton.

Second, Palin's presence on the Republican ticket forced family-values conservatives to give public support to working mothers, equal marriages, pregnant teens and their much-maligned parents. Talk-show frothers, Christian zealots and professional antifeminists—Rush Limbaugh and Phyllis Schlafly—insisted that a mother of five, including a "special-needs" newborn, could perfectly well manage governing a state (a really big state, as we were frequently reminded), while simultaneously running for veep and, who knows, field-dressing a moose. No one said she belonged at home. No one said she was neglecting her husband or failing to be appropriately submissive to him. No one blamed her for 17-year-old Bristol's out-of-wedlock pregnancy or hard-partying high-school-dropout boyfriend. No one even wondered out loud why Bristol wasn't getting married before the baby arrived. All these things have officially morphed from sins to "challenges," just part of normal family life. No matter how strategic this newfound broadmindedness is, it will not be easy to row away from it. Thanks to Sarah, ladies, we can do just about anything we want as long as we don't have an abortion.

Third, while Palin did not win the Hillary vote, the love she got from Republican women, including very conservative, traditional women, shows that what I like to call the feminism of everyday life is taking hold across the spectrum. That old frilly-doormat model of femininity is gone: even women who stay home and attend churches that bar women from the clergy thrill to the idea of women being all that they can be and taking their rightful place in the public realm. Like everyone else, they want respect and power, and now, finally, thanks to the women's movement they despise, they may actually get some.

Finally, Palin completed the task Hillary Clinton began: running in different parties across a single political season, they have normalized the idea of a woman in the White House. It is hard even to remember now how iconoclastic Hillary was—how hard it was for her to negotiate femininity and ambition, to be warm but not weak, smart but not cold, attractive but not sexy, dynamic but not threatening. Only a year ago, it was a real question whether men would vote for a woman or, for that matter, whether women would. Palin may have been unfit for high office, but just by running she showed there was more than one mode for a female politician. After almost two years of the whole country watching two very different women in the White House race, it finally seems normal.

So thanks, Sarah. And now, please—back to your iceberg. ■

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(*continued from page 9*)

But as any writer who had the luck to pass through his studio at WFMT radio in Chicago could tell you, listening was the least of it. Studs was, of course, also a reader and a nonstop talker who delighted in nothing so much as enthusiastically sharing his pleasure with his audience, reading passage after passage from his interviewee's book, which he had highlighted in advance with his yellow crayon ("Get this!" he would exclaim. "And this!").

Bud Trillin once observed that if the Guggenheim Foundation knew what it was doing, instead of giving writers monetary grants it would arrange to get its grantees on Studs's radio show. An hour on the air with Studs would leave them walking on air, a high that would last at least a year.

He could be funny, too. In the late 1970s Studs, who had a long history with *The Nation*—as reader, writer, cruiser, promoter—was serving as master of ceremonies at a *Nation* dinner honoring its recently retired great editor, Carey McWilliams. When the time came to introduce *The Nation*'s new young publisher, Hamilton Fish, Studs couldn't let the occasion pass without a comment on Ham's reactionary grandfather (of FDR and "Martin, Barton and Fish" fame). It just goes to show, he said, "the more things stay the same, the more they change."

Studs was a man of taste—and tastes. After Ham persuaded him to join *The Nation*'s group of modest shareholders, in those pre-fax days Ham sent his assistant, Shirley Sulat, all the way to Chicago to pick up his signature in time for the end-of-year deadline. Ham asked Studs if he needed anything from New York. Shirley showed up with the requested New York pastrami sandwich, and that sealed the deal.

The late Lee Hayes, of the Weavers folksingers, used to say that if it weren't for the honor of the thing, he'd just as soon not have been blacklisted. Studs appreciated the various honors bestowed on him over the years, but of none was he prouder than having been blacklisted. So he undoubtedly would have gotten a kick out of a story the *New York Times* ran a few days after his death. James Houtrides, who used to produce *CBS News Sunday Morning*, which often featured Studs along with John Leonard and others, wrote, "On Monday, November 3, Edward Rothstein, the *New York Times* critic, wrote 'An Appraisal' of Mr. Terkel and his work. You would have thought that he was a secret terrorist or communist and that the Cold War was still on." Look more closely, Rothstein wrote, "and it becomes less clear where his liberalism slips into radicalism."

Rothstein even noted that Terkel "wore something red every day to affirm his attachment to the working class." Think of that, we can imagine Studs riffing, "to be blacklisted when alive and redbaited after death—too good to be true." The ultimate comment, not so much on Studs as on the culture he so valiantly resisted.

On more than one occasion Studs would compare a journalist to I.F. Stone, George Seldes and/or Lincoln Steffens to indicate his highest accolade. Studs was more than a journalist, but his name now joins the ranks of those he so admired, with an add-on: he was our national griot, the bearer of the stories of people, ordinary and extraordinary.

VICTOR NAVASKY

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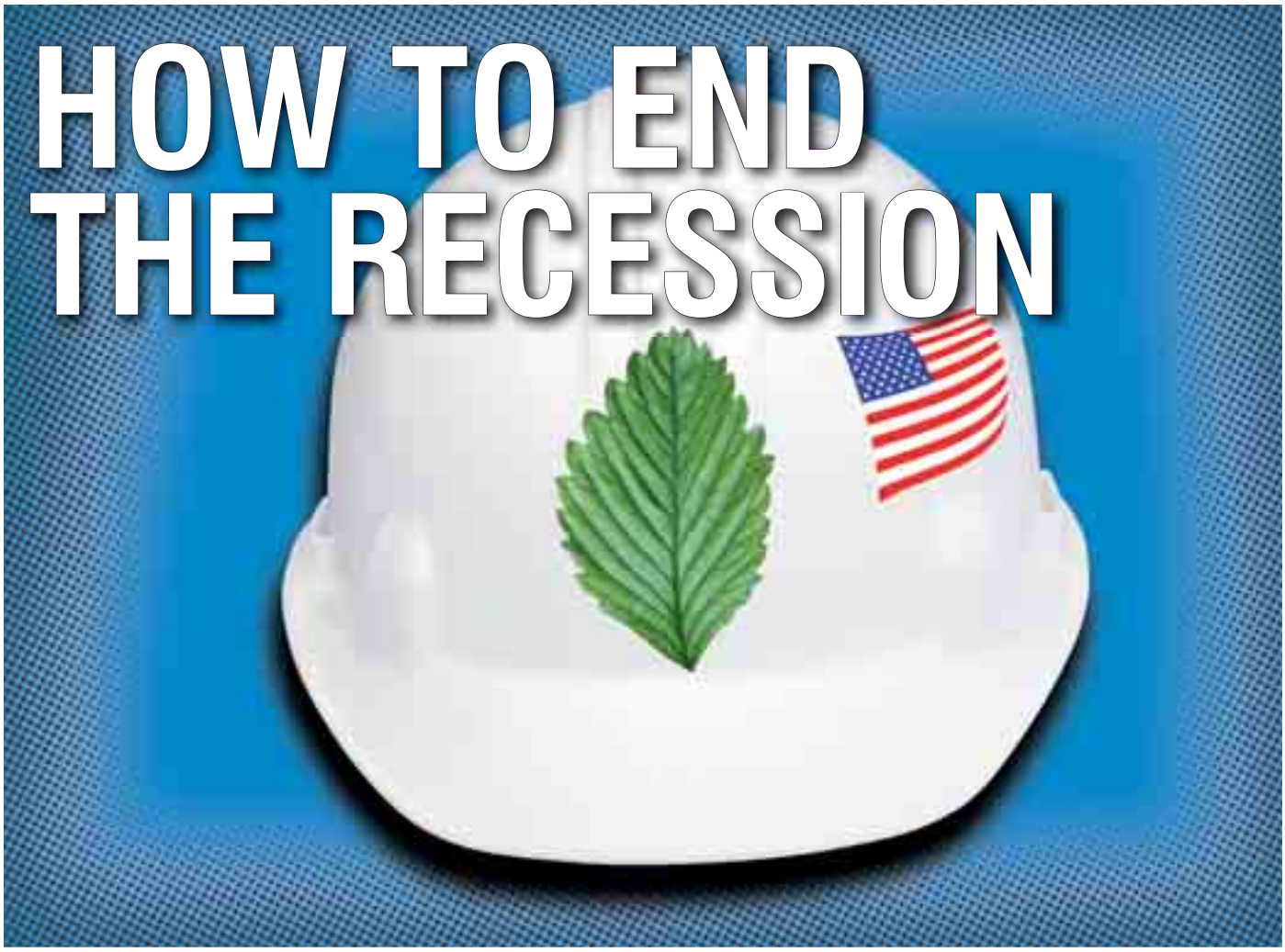
HOW TO END THE RECESSION



GENE CASE & STEPHEN KLING/AVENGING ANGELS

The economy needs a shot of public investment—and if it's green, the payoff will be greatest.

by ROBERT POLLIN

The collapse on Wall Street is now decimating Main Street, Ocean Parkway, Mountain View Drive and I-80. Since January the economy has shed 760,000 jobs. In September alone, monthly mass layoff claims for unemployment insurance jumped by 34 percent. General Electric, General Motors, Chrysler, Yahoo! and Xerox have all announced major layoffs, along with the humbled financial titans Goldman Sachs and Bank of America. Fully one-quarter of all businesses in the United States are planning to cut payroll over the next year. State governments are facing a tax revenue shortfall of roughly $100 billion in the next fiscal year, 15 percent of their overall budgets. Because states have rules requiring balanced budgets, they are staring at major budget cuts and layoffs. The fact that the economy's overall gross domestic product (GDP) shrank between July and September—the first such decline since the September 2001 terrorist attacks—only confirms the realities on the ground facing workers, households, businesses and the public sector.

The recession is certainly here, so the question now is how to diminish its length and severity. A large-scale federal government stimulus program is the only action that can possibly do the job.

So far, our leaders in Washington have dithered. Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson and Federal Reserve chair Ben Bernanke continue improvising with financial rescue plans, committing eye-popping sums of money in the process. Paulson's original program for the Treasury to commit $700 billion in taxpayers' money to purchase "toxic" loans—the mortgage-backed securities held by the private banks that are in default or arrears—was at least partially shelved in favor of direct government purchases of major ownership stakes in the banks. But neither of Paulson's strategies has thus far helped to stabilize the situation, with global stock and currency markets gyrating wildly and investors dumping risky business loans in favor of safe Treasury bonds. The crisis has even hit the previously staid world of money market mutual funds, where the fainthearted once could park their savings safely in exchange for low returns. Money market fund holders have been panic-selling since mid-September,

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dumping $500 billion worth of these accounts.

To stanch a money market fund collapse, Bernanke announced on October 21 that, on top of the Paulson bailout plan, the Fed stands ready to purchase $540 billion in certificates of deposit and private business loans from the money market funds. This action is in addition to two previous initiatives committing the Fed to buy up, as needed, business loans from failing banks. Until this crisis, the Fed had conducted monetary policy almost exclusively through the purchase and sale of Treasury bonds, rarely buying directly the debts of private businesses or banks. But the pre-crisis rules of monetary policy are out the window.

Even if some combination of Treasury and Federal Reserve actions begins to stabilize financial markets in the coming weeks, this will not, by itself, reverse the deepening crisis in the nonfinancial economy. A rise in unemployment in the range of 8 to 9 percent—upward of 14 million people without work—is becoming an increasingly likely scenario over the next year.

President-elect Obama as well as most members of the newly elected Democratic-controlled Congress seem to recognize the urgency of such a large-scale stimulus program above and beyond any financial bailout program. Even Bernanke, whose term of office continues through January 2010, has offered his endorsement. But despite the near consensus, questions remain, including: How should the stimulus funds be spent? How large does the stimulus need to be? Where do we find the money to pay for it?

A Green Public-Investment Stimulus

Recessions create widespread human suffering. Minimizing the suffering has to be the top priority in fighting the recession. This means expanding unemployment benefits and food stamps to counteract the income losses of unemployed workers and the poor. By stabilizing the pocketbooks of distressed households, these measures also help people pay their mortgages and pump money into consumer markets.

Beyond this, the stimulus program should be designed to meet three additional criteria. First, we have to generate the largest possible employment boost for a given level of new government spending. Second, the spending targets should be in areas that strengthen the economy in the long run, not just through a short-term money injection. And finally, despite the recession, we do not have the luxury of delaying the fight against global warming.

To further all these goals we need a green public-investment stimulus. It would defend state-level health and education projects against budget cuts; finance long-delayed upgrades for our roads, bridges, railroads and water management systems; and underwrite investments in energy efficiency—including building retrofits and public transportation—as well as new wind, solar, geothermal and biomass technologies.

This kind of stimulus would generate many more jobs—eighteen per $1 million in spending—than would programs to increase spending on the military and the oil industry (i.e., new military surges in Iraq or Afghanistan combined with "Drill, baby, drill"), which would generate only about 7.5 jobs for every $1 million spent. There are two reasons for the green program's advantage. The first factor is higher "labor intensity" of spending—that is, more money is being spent on hiring people and less on machines, supplies and consuming energy. This becomes obvious if we imagine hiring teachers, nurses and bus drivers versus drilling for oil off the coasts of Florida, California and Alaska. The second factor is the "domestic content" of spending—how much money is staying within the US economy, as opposed to buying imports or spending abroad. When we build a bridge in Minneapolis, upgrade the levee system in New Orleans or retrofit public buildings and private homes to raise their energy efficiency, virtually every dollar is spent within our economy. By contrast, only 80 cents of every dollar spent in the oil industry remains in the United States. The figure is still lower with the military budget.

What about another round of across-the-board tax rebates, such as the program the Bush administration and the Democratic Congress implemented in April? A case could be made for this in light of the financial stresses middle-class families are facing. However, even if we assume that the middle-class households will spend all the money refunded to them, the net increase in employment will be about fourteen jobs per $1 million spent—about 20 percent less than the green public-investment program (the main reason for this weaker impact is the lower domestic content of average household consumption). Also, it isn't likely that the households would spend all their rebate money. Just as with April's rebate program, households would channel a large share of the money into paying off debts.

The Matter of Size

This is no time to be timid. The stimulus program last April totaled $150 billion, including $100 billion in household rebates and the rest in business tax breaks. This initiative did encourage some job growth, though as we have seen, the impact would have been larger had the same money been channeled toward a green public-investment stimulus. But any job benefits were negated by the countervailing forces of the collapsed housing bubble, the financial crisis and the spike in oil prices. The resulting recession is now before us. This argues for a significantly larger stimulus than the one enacted in April. But how much larger?

One way to approach the question is to consider the last time the economy faced a recession of similar severity, which was in 1980–82, during Ronald Reagan's first term as president. In 1982 gross domestic product contracted by 1.9 percent, the most severe one-year drop in GDP since World War II. Unemployment rose to 9.7 percent that year, which was, again, the highest figure since the '30s.

The Reagan administration responded with a massive stimulus program, even though its alleged free-market devotees never acknowledged as much. They preferred calling their program of military expansion and tax cuts for the rich "supply-side economics." Whatever the label, this combina-

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tion generated an increase in the federal deficit of about two percentage points relative to the size of the economy at that time. In 1983 GDP rose sharply by 4.5 percent. In 1984 GDP growth accelerated to 7.2 percent, with Reagan declaring the return to "morning in America." Unemployment fell back to 7.5 percent.

In today's economy, an economic stimulus equivalent to the 1983 Reagan program would amount to about $300 billion in spending—roughly double the size of April's stimulus program, though in line with the high-end figures being proposed in Congress. A stimulus of this size could create nearly 6 million jobs, offsetting the job-shedding forces of the recession.

Of course, the green public-investment stimulus will be much more effective as a jobs program than the Reagan agenda of militarism and upper-income tax cuts. This suggests that an initiative costing somewhat less than $300 billion could be adequate to fight the job losses. But because the green public-investment stimulus is also designed to produce long-term benefits to the economy, there is little danger that we would spend too much. Since all these investments are needed to fight global warming and improve overall productivity, the sooner we move forward, the better. Moreover, under today's weak job market conditions, we will not run short of qualified workers.

How to Pay for All This?

Let's add up the figures I have tossed around. These include the $700 billion bank rescue operation being engineered by the Treasury, the $540 billion with which Fed chair Bernanke has pledged to bail out the money market mutual funds, along with unspecified additional billions to buy unwanted business debts held by banks. On top of these, I am proposing $300 billion for a second fiscal stimulus beyond last April's $150 billion program. At a certain point, it is fair to wonder whether we are still dealing with real dollars as opposed to Monopoly money.

In fact, the whole program remains within the realm of affordability, albeit approaching its upper bounds. But major adjustments from the current management approach are needed. In particular, the Federal Reserve has to continue exerting control over the Treasury on all bailout operations. That is, we need more initiatives like Bernanke's $540 billion program to stabilize the money market mutual funds and less Treasury fumbling with taxpayers' money to buy either the private banks' bad assets or ownership shares in the banks.

We need to recognize openly what has largely been an unspoken fact about these bailout operations: that the Federal Reserve has the power to create dollars at will, while the Treasury finances its operations either through tax revenues or borrowed funds (which means using taxpayer money at some later time to pay back its debts with interest). The Fed does not literally run printing presses when it decides to inject more money into the economy; but its normal activity of writing checks to private banks to buy the banks' Treasury bonds amounts to the same thing. When the banks receive their checks from the Fed, they have more cash on hand than they did before they sold their Treasury bonds to the Fed. Especially during crises, there is no reason for the Fed to restrain itself from making good use (though of course not overuse) of this dollar-creating power.

The Fed is also supposed to be the chief regulator of the financial system. Now is the time to make up for Alan Greenspan's confessed failures over twenty years in this role. In exchange for the Fed protecting the private financial institutions from collapse, Bernanke must insist that the banks begin lending money again to support productive investments, while prohibiting them from yet another return to high-rolling speculation. Special measures are also needed to keep people in their homes.

The Deficit Looms

When the economy began slowing this year, the fiscal deficit more than doubled, from $162 billion to $389 billion. We cannot know for certain how much the deficit will expand. It could rise to $800 billion, $1 trillion or even somewhat higher, depending on how the bailout operations are managed. Of course, it would be utterly self-defeating for the United States to run a reckless fiscal policy, no matter how pressing the need to fight the financial crisis and recession. But in the current crisis conditions, even a $1 trillion deficit need not be reckless.

Let's return to the Reagan experience for perspective. In 1983 the Reagan deficits peaked at 6 percent of the economy's GDP. With GDP now around $14.4 trillion, a $1 trillion deficit would represent about 7 percent of GDP, one percentage point higher than the 1983 figure.

Of course, the global financial system has undergone dramatic changes since the 1980s, so direct comparisons with the Reagan deficits are not entirely valid. One change is that government debt is increasingly owned by foreign governments and private investors. This means that interest payments on that debt flow increasingly from the coffers of the Treasury to foreign owners of Treasury bonds.

At the same time, as one feature of the crisis, Treasury bonds are, and will remain for some time, the safest and most desirable financial instrument in the global financial system. US and foreign investors are clamoring to purchase Treasuries as opposed to buying stocks, bonds issued by private companies or derivatives. This is pushing down the interest rates on Treasuries. For example, on October 15, 2007, a three-year Treasury bond paid out 4.25 percent in interest, whereas this past October 15, the interest payment had fallen to 1.9 percent. By contrast, a BAA corporate bond paid 6.6 percent in interest one year ago but has risen this year to 9 percent. As long as the private financial markets remain gripped by instability and fear, the Treasury will be able to borrow at negligible interest rates. Because of this, allowing the deficit to rise even as high as 7 percent of GDP does not represent a burden on the Treasury greater than what accompanied the Reagan deficits.

There is, then, no reason to tread lightly in fighting the recession, with all its attendant dangers and misery. Indeed, severe misery and danger will certainly rise as long as timidity—the path of least resistance—establishes the boundaries of acceptable action. The incoming Obama administration can take decisive steps now to defend people's livelihoods and to reconstruct a viable financial system, productive infrastructure and job market on the foundation of a clean-energy economy. ■

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It's the Solution, Not the Problem

Faith-based claims about the dangers of big government do not stand up to the evidence.

by JEFF MADRICK

The financial crisis jeopardizing living standards around the world is the direct result of the antigovernment attitudes that began to spread in the United States as far back as the 1970s and reached their height in the George W. Bush administration. It had become conventional wisdom that high levels of taxes, government spending and regulation—in sum, big government—inevitably undermine a nation's prosperity. The claims, embraced enthusiastically by business, apparently also struck a deep intuitive chord among Americans. The dangers of big government had become so obvious to so many over the past thirty years that they hardly seemed to require demonstration any longer, even among many Democrats. Government was widely seen as the problem and rarely the solution, a sharp reversal of attitudes that prevailed for the first two-thirds of that century. Cutting taxes was the main rallying cry, but deregulation was its close cousin. Starting in the 1980s, with Ronald Reagan's presidency in particular but extended by George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton and George W. Bush—as well as Alan Greenspan, the ideological Federal Reserve chair who won far more credibility than he deserved—the government reduced its regulatory oversight radically over the course of a generation.

President Clinton proudly announced the new position in 1996. "The era of big government is over," he said with fanfare in his State of the Union address, the year of his presidential re-election bid. He successfully raised taxes on better-off Americans in 1993 but with the express purpose of reducing the federal deficit, not developing new social programs. In the ensuing years, considerable regulatory damage was done. Even after severe financial storms in the late '90s in Asia and Russia and at hedge funds in New York, neither the Republicans nor the Democrats asked for new regulatory authority or requirements for disclosure of more information. Now even Greenspan acknowledges serious errors of judgment. No one knows the extent of the liabilities of financial firms today because of the lack of federal oversight of financial derivatives. The Clinton administration signed off on the end of the Glass-Steagall legislation, which had separated in law and spirit commercial and investment banking, and Clinton's Treasury secretary prevented the Commodities Futures Trading Commission from actively regulating derivatives.

But it was the George W. Bush administration that took up the Reagan banner with energy and vindictive delight. Bush engineered enormous tax cuts, but the loosening of regulations was also integral to his philosophy. In 2004, for example, the Securities and Exchange Commission undid restrictions

KAREN CALDICOTT

on how much investment banks could borrow, even as they made enormous profits. In return, the banks volunteered to open their books to the SEC, though this option was never aggressively pursued. Bush's appointee as SEC chair, Christopher Cox, formerly a conservative Congressman, enforced the program with the deliberate Bush-style laxity that has characterized the administration's management of the Food and Drug Administration, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Federal Aviation Administration and, of course, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, which so tragically mangled the Hurricane Katrina rescue efforts. Cox has admitted that the voluntary program did not work and has urged comprehensive securities regulation at last.

All of this is part of a mythology about the dangerous consequences of big government that does not and never did stand up to economic evidence. According to the best mainstream economic research, big-government and high-tax nations simply do not grow any more slowly than nations with proportionally lower levels of government spending and taxes. They do not have lower levels of productivity. The lack of any statistical relationship between taxes and economic prosperity suggests government must often be doing something right.

After all, the fastest growth of social programs in history—the rise of the so-called welfare state—took place in the rich Western nations and Japan over the three decades after 1950. Over that same period, which included the sharp rise in oil prices in the '70s, the economies of these same countries expe-

Jeff Madrick is the author of The Case for Big Government, *from which this article is adapted. He is the editor of* Challenge Magazine, *visiting professor at Cooper Union and senior fellow of the Schwartz Center for Economic Analysis at The New School.*

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Dr. Bart D. Ehrman is the James A. Gray Professor and Chair of the Department of Religion at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The author or editor of 17 books, he has received many awards and prizes during his tenure at UNC including the Bowman and Gordon Gray Award for excellence in teaching.

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rienced rapid growth. Today, no government of a Western nation spends less than 10 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), and many spend much more, on its poor, unhealthy and aged—what economists call social transfers—and all are immensely wealthy by historical standards. In addition to spending on social transfers, they also spend significantly on education and infrastructure, and they all remain vibrant democracies as well.

Because most of these high-tax economies do well, much of that tax money evidently must be spent constructively, on programs that inspire a sense of confidence and promote good health, education and efficient transportation. There may well be moderate disincentives to invest and work, but many of the programs are intelligently oriented to minimize these. For example, even high levels of unemployment insurance, a particular bête noire of conservatives, can remove less productive workers from the labor force and minimize any damaging consequences from shirking work.

Intelligent regulations, in turn, enable markets to work better by making information more available and reducing abuse and corruption. Regulations can save a lot of money over time, even if they cost more in the short run, as the current experience painfully shows. The evidence does not deter opponents of government. Many critics argued, for example, that Sweden's welfare state had gone too far in the 1980s—taxes were too high and wages too generous. Incomes compared with those of the rest of the wealthy countries were no longer near the top of the tables. Adjustments were made in Sweden, including tax cuts, and conditions improved. But Sweden did not cut taxes or social spending nearly to US levels, or even to those of Britain. To the contrary, social transfers remained a very high proportion of national income, roughly 30 percent of GDP, not including education expenditures. The United States expends only about 13 percent of GDP on such social transfers (Social Security, Medicare, unemployment insurance, housing and poverty).

Yet with such high levels of social transfers, the growth rate of GDP per person in Sweden from the mid-1990s was as high through the mid-2000s as the growth rate of the United States or most European nations—many of which equaled America's GDP growth rate per capita during this period (which included the Clinton boom years).

The average compensation for manufacturing workers in Sweden is about equal to that of America. (To make the wages comparable in this example, they are adjusted for what is called purchasing power parity—the amount of goods and services the wage actually buys.) Sweden's productivity, which many economists argue is inevitably damaged by high levels of social transfers, has not fallen off the table. It is about 87 percent of America's level. Although America's productivity is 15 percent higher than the average of nations in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)—the two dozen or so richest nations in the world—it is lower than or at best equal to that of a half-dozen nations with much higher taxes and rates of social spending. Roughly half the OECD countries pay higher or equivalent wages to workers in manufacturing, and almost all provide more benefits than do US companies.

Let us now look at how the changing size of American

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government has affected US prosperity in recent years. In a 2002 foreword to a new edition of his popular 1962 book *Capitalism and Freedom*, Milton Friedman wrote that America had at last recognized the damage done by big government. He apparently had the Clinton boom of the late '90s in mind. But during the Clinton boom, which Friedman implied had to do with less government, tax receipts rose to 20 percent of GDP, much higher than at any time since the final years of World War II. Federal spending—though it grew more slowly under Clinton, largely because of the peace dividend following the cold war and the slower growth of healthcare costs—remained at higher levels than those in the early 1970s, when Friedman was arguing that government was much too big and was bound to stimulate inflation. In the early '70s, at that level of government spending, inflation was rising rapidly; in the late 1990s, it was falling.

Some still argue, of course, that the 1981 income tax cuts under Reagan produced the Clinton boom. Given that they occurred fifteen years earlier, the claim is farfetched on the face of it. Reagan did not even cut taxes overall. While income taxes were cut, which conservative economists argue should have provided wonderful incentives for economic growth, payroll taxes for Social Security and Medicare were markedly increased. Total taxes as a proportion of GDP were about the same in Reagan's last year in office as they were in three of the four years of Jimmy Carter's presidency.

What Reagan did was undermine the impact of regulations, largely failing to enforce or implement many of them. Despite the lower income tax rate and persistent deregulation, productivity growth rates (adjusted for the ups and downs of the business cycle) did not improve under Reagan or his successor, George H.W. Bush. The productivity takeoff began in 1996, not long after the Clinton income tax increase. Harvard economist Martin Feldstein, Republican House leader Dick Armey and others predicted that the tax increase would have the opposite effect.

How did the wealthiest nation in history come to believe for a generation, even when it was prosperous in the late 1990s, that it was not wealthy enough to provide what was needed in a more complex and global society?

In the past, when America required canals, railroads and highways, it financed them. When it needed better and broader education, it provided it. When it needed sewer and sanitation systems, and vaccines to prevent widespread disease, it created them. When unemployment became a fact of industrial life, it insured workers against it. When America was at its best, it did not look back and say, We never did this before so we can't do it now. Ultimately it did what was necessary.

Part of the nation's new agenda must be to rid itself of the deep-seated pessimism that it does not acknowledge. Promising a new "morning in America," Reagan ironically ushered in the age of limits he accused Carter of creating. With Reagan, slow wage growth and high levels of unemployment became accepted. Today's coming deep recession is a consequence.

America has no free and high-quality daycare or pre-K institutions to nourish and comfort two-worker families, and work and family are undermined as a consequence. College

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has become far more expensive, and attendance is bifurcated by class: the privileged go to the best colleges, and good jobs are increasingly available only to those who attend the best colleges. Transportation infrastructure has been notoriously neglected. It is decaying and has not been adequately modernized to meet energy-efficient standards or global competition. America has not responded to a new world of high energy costs and global warming. The country has a healthcare system that is out of control, providing inadequate quality at very high prices—specializing in high-technology medicine at the expense of better overall care. And its financial system has run amok. Speculation and financial panic reminiscent of the harsh 1800s has been the result. Most important, average incomes have been flat or only slightly higher for a generation; for men, that has been true since the early 1970s. In the 2000s, compensation for men and women has fallen. As we enter a recession, wages are about to fall sharply.

These facts amount to about as conclusive a proof as history ever provides that the ideology applied in this generation has failed. This was Reagan's Trojan horse, disguised as optimism. He sent in a plan to reduce help to most Americans under the guise of an ideology of personal responsibility that would ultimately make everyone better off; instead it largely helped an increasingly privileged upper tier. From the economic evidence, history and the performance of other nations, we know the following: if federal, state and local governments absorb another 4 or 5 percent of GDP in America, it will not inhibit growth or undermine entrepreneurial spirit, productivity or prosperity if the spending is well channeled. Government absorbs much more of national income in other nations whose prosperity is the equivalent of or perhaps superior to America's. If government programs are managed well, they will enhance productivity. A rise in government spending of 5 percent of GDP will raise approximately $750 billion a year for federal, state and local governments to provide protection to workers, finance social programs, maintain an adequate regulatory presence and significantly raise the level of investment in transportation, energy, education and healthcare. Once we emerge from this recession—and only after that—part and perhaps all of this $750 billion can be paid for with higher taxes.

If federal, state and local governments absorb another 4 or 5 percent of GDP, it will not inhibit growth or undermine productivity.

Let's try to keep the discussion more politically practical, however. If we lower our sights to an additional 3 percent of GDP for new government programs, the nation would have more than $450 billion a year with which to work. Four hundred fifty billion dollars a year could make Social Security entirely solvent by current estimates, with no further reductions in benefits; provide universal pre-K education to America's 3- to 5-year-olds; and leave enough money to pay two years of tuition for all college students. Thirty billion dollars a year could go a long way toward repairing and updating transportation infrastructure and making it far more energy efficient. Some competent scientists argue that we could transfer the nation from fossil fuel to solar energy for only a little more than that a year.

What seem to many Americans like pragmatic limitations on spending, the proper role of government or responsible fiscal management will very likely someday be seen for what they truly are: a reflection of deep pessimism, the rise in power of vested interests seeking tax cuts and special benefits, and a tragic forgoing of responsibility. Boldness of government does not mean that the right choices will always be made. The Iraq War serves as a supreme and tragic reminder of government activism gone awry. But liberals make errors too, and once a government program has started, it is indeed hard to close down.

This should not be a deterrence. We tolerate wrong choices and a lot of waste in business in order not to suppress its "animal spirits." And it is hard to shut down businesses as well. Consider the multiple bailouts on Wall Street right now, and also the recent loans to automakers. But the government has been bailing out financial and other firms for many years: Chrysler in the 1970s, Continental Illinois and the savings and loan associations in the 1980s, the creditors of Long-Term Capital Management in the 1990s and so on. Such examples understate the breadth of government bailouts. When the Federal Reserve rapidly loosened monetary policies in 1972, 1987, 1998 and 2001, it did so to bail out the excesses of business as well.

With an annual GDP of $15 trillion, the United States has the resources and capabilities to recapture its energies and optimism. Government can and must be a full partner to business in economic development and a senior partner in the equitable distribution of benefits and true practical freedoms. What history and contemporary examples teach us is that the nation has the capacity to regulate, tax and invest adequately in public goods without undermining the entrepreneurial capacity and material prosperity of the nation.

Granted, attitudes have momentarily turned in favor of financial regulation and government bailouts. But is the attitudinal conversion merely skin-deep? Not only must the nation stem the draining of capital from the financial system; it must also stimulate the economy to raise it from steep and painful recession. Solving the financial crisis will not be enough, and deepening recession will lead to more financial emergencies as homeowners default on more mortgages and even businesses start to default on their debt.

The re-regulation of Wall Street will be a pressing challenge to the newly elected President Obama. But the main challenge will be to provide the stimulus the economy needs to avoid tragedy while investing in America's healthcare, education, broadband, green-energy technology and transportation—the assets it needs to compete in a more competitive world. We shall see whether we will renounce the bad habit of ideology in favor of the pragmatism America always exhibits in its best moments. ■

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Letters

(continued from page 2)

In February 2007 I went with a faith-based group (which included people I knew from the nonprofit arena) to the Mississippi Gulf Coast and spent a week helping to build a house for a family displaced by Hurricane Katrina. Every morning before we started work, a minister in the group said a short prayer about our being there to do God's work. Since I couldn't relate to this, I asked him during lunch one day how he explained a person like me, who was there to build a house because I thought it was the right thing to do. He said that God was working through me, I just didn't know it. I was amazed at the complete certainty of this lovely man and the total dismissal of any other possible explanation.
Gwenn Karel Levine

Hamden, Conn.
Sympathetic as I am to the views of Ronald Aronson, it needs to be pointed out that there is probably no one "with no faith at all." This is a non sequitur based on the peculiar Judeo-Christian notion that faith and belief mean having a concept of God. I am a 95-year-old naturalist who has traveled the world and learned to appreciate its landscapes, along with their wonderful tapestry of living species. This involved visiting all the continents and both polar regions. Consequently, I have a strong sense of cosmic piety, which philosophers consider the basis of all world religions. By accident of birth I was a devout Catholic. But I outgrew those parochial views. The church failed to impart the sense of stewardship we need to share and enjoy this beautiful blue planet. We overpopulated it, made excessive demands on its productivity and generated the negative feedback we call global warming. Canadian religious writer Charles Taylor accuses people like me of "the presumption of unbelief," but I think it more humble to believe that we humans are so new to the planet, so immature, that we are simply not ready to ask the question of God. Let's tend the garden first.
Roland C. Clement

No More Spinach! (Those Days Are Over)

Bethesda, Md.
Re Cockburn's "The Election Is Over" ["Beat the Devil," Oct. 27]: I sit down and read you the moment I take you from the postbox—I love *The Nation*. But *please*—we've eaten our broccoli and peas (eight years of the Bush administration). Let us enjoy our dessert (Obama's win) without telling us it's time to go to bed!
Patricia Morgan

The Buck Stopped Here

Las Vegas
If Gore Vidal enjoys tilting (at) history, that doesn't mean George Scialabba should do the same in reviewing his essays ["Civic Virtues," Oct. 27]. To question Arthur Schlesinger Jr.'s attitudes is all well and good, but to write that "Vidal's bête noire (and not surprisingly, Schlesinger's hero) was Harry Truman" surely will surprise all who have called Schlesinger the court historian to the Kennedys. It will especially surprise historians who have read *The Age of Jackson* and his three-volume *The Age of Roosevelt*, books in which he views Jackson and Franklin Roosevelt as iconic figures. To suggest under those circumstances that Truman was Schlesinger's hero is the sort of argument Vidal no doubt would have fun demolishing.
Michael Green

Scialabba Replies

Cambridge, Mass.
Michael Green has a point. Schlesinger adulated the Kennedys, revered Jackson and FDR, and merely admired Truman. By all means, let us discriminate.
George Scialabba

Crown Prince of Jordan

Placitas, N.M.
As someone who first visited Jordan in 1958, spent more than four years there in the 1980s as a USAID foreign service officer, returned for nearly two more years in 1999—about the time King Hussein passed away—and knew the King and his Hashemite family well, I'd like to point out to letter writer Jennifer Copelin and reviewer Bernard Avishai that Crown Prince Hassan, whom both refer to as King Hussein's "son," was, in fact, his younger brother ["Letters," Oct. 20]. Hussein appointed Hassan as Crown Prince when the King's children were quite young; it was thought strategic to have an adult succeed to the throne in the case of the King's death by assassination (a real possibility in those times). When Abdullah succeeded in 1999, by virtue of his father's change of the order of succession to his children, he was a grown man.
Lewis P. Reade

Scholarly Letters Only, Please

Idaho Falls, Idaho
Sometime back in the '80s, I wrote my first letter to *The Nation*, protesting the magazine's new policy of opening its Letters column to anyone who wrote in. Up to that time, only letters from people directly involved in the event or issue covered in an article or who had special knowledge or experience of the matters covered were published. Then the author of the article was given space to reply. I can't count the number of times I have been outraged or impressed by an article, changed my mind after reading the Letters column and, often, changed my mind again on reading the author's reply. This made *The Nation* different from all the other newsmagazines, I said, because it "took the pulse of its readership in the Letters column." I urged the editors to return to the old policy. *The Nation* published my letter and shortly afterward did return to the old policy.

I see it's time for me to write the same letter again. I have no objection to reading an occasional letter from a subscriber who is especially witty or informative, but on the whole I prefer the more scholarly approach. A debate in writing between people intimately involved and the author of an article is far more informative and useful than a column full of letters that vent or wisecrack or accuse. Please return to the old Letters policy!
Sandra Brow

Clarification, Emendation, Correction

Because of a misunderstanding with Doubleday, photographer Jane Bown was not credited for the portrait of Gore Vidal accompanying the review of his *Selected Essays* (Oct. 27).

The first epigraph above Jonathan Schell's "When the Gloves Come Off" (Nov. 3) is credited to Peter Viereck ("Reality is that which, when you don't believe in it, doesn't go away"). Viereck was, consciously or unconsciously, paraphrasing Philip K. Dick ("Reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn't go away").

In last week's lead editorial, "Why We Vote," Hamilton County should have been located in Ohio, not Florida.

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Books & the Arts.

Between Reticence and Revelation

by JAMES LONGENBACH

Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell are the two most prominent members of the second wave of modern American poetry—the generation of poets who came of age after the groundbreaking achievements of T.S. Eliot, Marianne Moore and Wallace Stevens. Other poets of this second wave may seem more relevant: George Oppen's combination of formal adventurousness and emotional lyricism has been especially influential over the past twenty years, and the profligate energy of John Berryman (perhaps the most gifted poet of the second wave) has yet to be assimilated. But Bishop and Lowell continue to dominate the stories we tell about twentieth-century poetry, not only because of the continuing power of their poems but because of their intricate friendship—a friendship that endured far longer than any more intimate relationship sustained by either poet. "You have no idea, Cal," wrote Bishop to Lowell in 1962, using Lowell's nickname, "how really grateful to you I am and how fortunate I feel myself in knowing you, having you for a friend. When I think of how the world and my life would look to me if you weren't in either of them at all—they'd look very empty, I think."

This abiding affection was mutual. But it was complicated by barely suppressed professional jealousy, and it was challenged at crucial moments by alcoholism and mental illness. Over the thirty years of their friendship, Bishop and Lowell saw each other only rarely (Bishop lived in Brazil from 1951 to 1967), and their meetings often released an emotional intensity that is difficult to parse, especially since they tended to coincide with Lowell's manic breakdowns: on more than one occasion he confessed to Bishop that she was the true love of his life.

James Longenbach's most recent books are Draft of a Letter, *a collection of poems, and* The Art of the Poetic Line, *essays on poetry.*

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Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell in Rio de Janeiro, 1962

"DEAREST ELIZABETH COME HERE AND JOIN ME ITS PARADISE," Lowell cabled from Buenos Aires after visiting Bishop and her lover, Lota de Macedo Soares, in Rio in 1962.

These episodes are recorded in *Words in Air: The Complete Correspondence* by virtue of their absence: the frequent exchange of letters ceases, then starts up again with poignantly terse acknowledgment of what transpired. Many of the letters are newsy in a way that feels anxious, the epistolary equivalent of the kind of conversation that happens at a dinner party after someone storms from the table. One is tempted to skip ahead—especially since the most riveting letters (such as the fraught exchanges over Lowell's adaptation of the letters of Elizabeth Hardwick, his second wife, in *The Dolphin*) were published almost twenty years ago in David Kalstone's elegant critical study *Becoming a Poet: Elizabeth Bishop With Marianne Moore and Robert Lowell* and subsequently collected in *The Letters of Robert Lowell*, edited by Saskia Hamilton, and *One*

Words in Air
The Complete Correspondence Between Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell.
Edited by Thomas Travisano with Saskia Hamilton.
Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 875 pp. $45.

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Art: Letters, edited by Bishop's longtime friend and editor Robert Giroux. Unlike these books, however, *Words in Air* allows us to experience the peculiar rhythm of the Bishop-Lowell relationship, a relationship conducted almost exclusively through the mail. The letters are assiduously but unobtrusively annotated by Thomas Travisano and Saskia Hamilton, and sometimes the dullest letters are also the most weirdly revealing.

Bishop and Lowell met in 1947 at a dinner party given by Randall Jarrell, another poet of the second wave. Their correspondence began immediately thereafter—with mildly entertaining trivialities. Bishop to Lowell, August 14, 1947:

> I was called out to see a calf being born in the pasture beside the house. In five minutes after several falls on its nose it was standing up shaking its head & tail & trying to nurse. They took it away from its mother almost immediately & carried it struggling in a wheelbarrow to the barn—we've just been watching it trying to lie down. Once up it didn't know how to get down again & finally fell in a heap.

Behind this letter lies not only the Jarrell dinner party but Lowell's review of Bishop's first book, *North & South*, which appeared in the *Sewanee Review* in the summer of 1947. "Her admirers are not likely to hail her as a giant among the moderns," wrote Lowell, "or to compare anything that she will ever write with Shakespeare or Donne. Nevertheless, the splendor and minuteness of her descriptions soon seem wonderful." Bishop's self-consciously charming letter plays to Lowell's praise—as if she were eager to prove that, while she'd never be Shakespeare or Donne, she's spot-on about dairy farming.

Given the prominence that Bishop has accrued since her death, in 1979, it's difficult to remember that she spent her entire career standing in the shadow of Robert Traill Spence Lowell Jr., who was infinitely more famous than she: Lowell was not a reticent describer of mundanities but the maker of the taste by which the second wave of modern American poets was judged. By 1947 he had already won his first Pulitzer Prize, for *Lord Weary's Castle*; and in the '60s, while Bishop was living in Brazil and publishing infrequently, Lowell was refusing invitations to the Johnson White House and appearing on the cover of *Time* magazine. By that time Bishop had also won important prizes, but she remained (in John Ashbery's phrase) a "writer's writer's writer," and her wariness around Lowell, whom she also loved, took different forms over time.

In 1948 Lowell forwarded to Bishop these remarks about her poems by the Harvard philosopher George Santayana: "I *liked* 'North & South' especially for its delicacy. If it were not for the Darky Woman who is looking for a husband that shall be monogamous ['Songs for a Colored Singer'], I should have thought that Elizabeth Bishop had little sense of reality." Bishop responded that she was "delighted" with Santayana's remarks, but that hardly seems possible, especially since a poet renowned for her descriptive powers might be expected to have some sense of reality. She parried by sending Lowell these remarks by her friend Margaret Miller, a curator at the Museum of Modern Art: "I have never read a word of R. L. and had suspected that at least a portion of your enthusiasm for the poetry could be laid to professional politeness. I was therefore unprepared for all that blacktongued piratical vigor. I can't read more than three or four poems at a sitting—it's a little like smelling salts—but they are remarkable and wonderful, though the rhymes seem a little *too* strong or crass on occasions."

This is a keenly perceptive account of the poems of *Lord Weary's Castle*, which are as aggressively apocalyptic as the poems of *North & South* are retiringly descriptive. But description was for Bishop a very complicated and often calculated enterprise, as her poems and correspondence reveal: "The water looks like blue gas—the harbor is always a mess, here, junky little boats all piled up, some hung with sponges and always a few half sunk or splintered up from the most recent hurricane. It reminds me a little of my desk." Bishop sent this account of the harbor at Key West to Lowell in 1948, and a year later she reported that she'd "sold the *New Yorker* a medium length bit of plain description." She was referring to her poem "The Bight," which grew from her letter about Key West and is anything but a bit of plain description:

> Some of the little white boats are
> still piled up
> against each other, or lie on their
> sides, stove in,
> and not yet salvaged, if they ever
> will be, from the last bad storm,
> like torn-open, unanswered letters.
> The bight is littered with old
> correspondences.
> Click. Click. Goes the dredge,
> and brings up a dripping jawful of
> marl.
> All the untidy activity continues,
> awful but cheerful.

These lines are about the power of description—about how the meticulous attention to the surface of things inevitably dredges up sordid emotional depths. The point of "The Bight" is not merely to offer an account of a dilapidated harbor but to dramatize a state of mind that finds itself mirrored in such dilapidation. The poem is subtitled "On my birthday," and its final line ("awful but cheerful") appears, by Bishop's request, on her tombstone. Her characterization of "The Bight" as a "bit of plain description" only reinforces the poem's strategy of reticent understatement, and her motive in employing that characterization to Lowell is difficult to read. Was her coyness an invitation into her private world, a world she needed simultaneously to construct and conceal? Or did she think that the purveyor of blacktongued piratical vigor would be deaf to such subtlety?

I suspect the latter. Lowell to Bishop, August 16, 1948: "If you'd come to Ipswich—you'd have found waiting for you: Anne Dick, Elliott and Mrs. Chandler, the woman who almost converted Mrs. Sortwell, and my first project for you: age 41, weight: 155, hair: full black graying. He has lived for 20 years in a spic and span little white house with two aged servants tending lambs and reading Thoreau and writing a book which no one has seen." Lowell's "project" was to find Bishop (who was not yet acknowledging her lesbianism publicly) a husband. Bishop to Lowell: "I think you've done an enormous amount of ground-work already & I can see I picked the right person to solve my problems about my future for me." Was she serious? Bishop to Carley Dawson, Lowell's ex-girlfriend, a few days later: "if I wanted to remain friends with Cal at all, I'd better not see him for some time."

Behind this exchange lurks a mysterious but emotionally momentous day that Bishop and Lowell spent together in Stonington, Maine, in the summer of 1948. Lowell had arrived in Stonington with Dawson; Bishop came with Tom Wanning, whose relationship to Bishop remains unclear. But after a few days, Dawson left with Wanning, leaving Lowell and Bishop alone. They talked, they went swimming: Lowell decided he wanted to marry Bishop. Nine years later, in 1957, after a manic breakdown reawakened this fantasy, Lowell explained his embarrassing behavior by reaching back to "that long swimming and sunning Stonington day after Carley's removal by Tommy":

> I was feeling the infected hollowness

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of the Carley business draining out of my heart, and you said rather humorously yet it was truly meant, "When you write my epitaph, you must say I was the loneliest person who ever lived." Probably you forget, and anyway all that is mercifully changed and all has come right since you found Lota. But at the time everything, I guess (I don't want to overdramatize) our relations seemed to have reached a new place. I assumed that [it] would be just a matter of time before I proposed and I half believed that you would accept.... But asking you is *the* might have been for me, the one towering change, the other life that might have been had.

This kind of frankness was unusual even after Lowell and Bishop had known each other for many years. They communicated most intimately by indirection, by emblem, by letters that seem self-consciously like literature rather than an unfettered exchange between friends. Bishop did not respond to Lowell's confession, though she fussed over a pointlessly detailed account of a sailing expedition that Lowell used as a way of ramping up to the confession.

"Confession" is of course a word inextricable from Lowell's achievement, since the phrase "confessional poetry" was coined by the critic M.L. Rosenthal in a review of Lowell's *Life Studies*, published in September 1959 in this magazine. In these poems, Lowell abandoned the blacktongued piratical vigor of his early work for what Bishop immediately recognized as "a strangely modest tone"—"they are all about yourself and yet do not sound conceited!" What Bishop could not have known was that in the wake of his 1957 breakdown, Lowell discovered this tone by writing poems about Bishop, spoken by Bishop or emulating Bishop's sensibility. He was obsessed. "Skunk Hour," modeled on Bishop's "Armadillo," came first, and it was followed swiftly by poems that adopt Bishop's way of rendering acute psychological states by seeming merely to account for the surface of things.

In my Father's bedroom:
blue threads as thin
as pen-writing on the bedspread,
blue dots on the curtains,
a blue kimono,
Chinese sandals with blue plush
straps.

"Really I've just broken through to where you've always been," wrote Lowell to Bishop, but he also traveled to places where she'd never go, as in this draft of a poem spoken by Bishop:

Starlike the eagle on my locket
watch,
Mother's sole heirloom. I hear her,
"All I want
To do is kill you!"—I, a child of
four;
She, early American and militant.

Bishop's mother was committed to a sanitarium in 1916, when Bishop was 5. Bishop to Lowell, December 11, 1957, with studied nonchalance: "While I remember it—one small item that I may have mentioned before. If you ever do anything with the poem about me, would you change the remark my mother was supposed to have made? She never did make it; in fact I don't remember any direct threats, except the usual maternal ones. Her danger for me was just implied in the things I overheard the grown-ups say before and after her disappearance."

Bishop had written about her mother's mental illness in her story "In the Village," but her method (as in her letters and poems) was implication, not hyperbole; it's hard to imagine Bishop putting the aggrandizing

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modifier "sole" in front of "heirloom," much less literalizing the implied danger of her mother's behavior in a direct threat. Remaking his style in the poems of *Life Studies*, Lowell learned from Bishop how to let description do the talking; but unlike Bishop, he ultimately gravitated toward gothic rather than ordinary details. In addition, the construction of a dramatic voice was crucial to Lowell's poems in a way that was ancillary even to Bishop's dramatic monologues, which aren't theatrical. This is why Lowell's well-known account of the new style (a breakthrough to where Bishop had always been) has always seemed more flattering than strictly accurate. This is also why Lowell's style became massively influential, an immediately identifiable turning point in literary history, while Bishop's style could still seem unlikely to produce poems worthy of Shakespeare or Donne.

Few people would stand by that judgment today; following confessional poetry's decline in prestige, Bishop has been used as a club to beat Lowell, much as Lowell was used as a club to beat T.S. Eliot. But however powerful Bishop's style might be, that style depends (like Lowell's—like any indelible style) on the transformation of personal limitation into a strategic power that stops just short of becoming a method. So while Bishop's letters to Lowell (if not to all her correspondents) can seem cloying in their dependence on charm, her poems almost never do. Yet Bishop often worried that her poems were superficial.

"I think we both shy from talking emotionally," wrote Lowell to Bishop near the end of his life, "then it comes out sometimes." It came out most dramatically when Bishop responded to the manuscript of *The Dolphin* (1973), Lowell's Pulitzer Prize–winning book about the end of his marriage with Elizabeth Hardwick and his new life with Caroline Blackwood. The lacerating poems based on Hardwick's letters are crucial to the book's structure, especially in the versions that Bishop first read:

> your clowning makes us want to
> vomit—you bore,
> bore, bore the friends who wished
> to save your image
> from this genteel, disgraceful
> hospital.

"One can use one's life as material," wrote Bishop to Lowell in a long, anguished letter; "one does, anyway—but these letters—aren't you violating a trust? IF you were given permission—IF you hadn't changed them… etc. But *art just isn't worth that much*."

This letter has been famous for a long time; its power is reinforced by Bishop's equally well-known belief that poets must tell the truth in their poems, rendering places and people with an accuracy that bears a kind of moral seductiveness. "I can't tell a lie even for art," she quipped. But like Bishop's statements about description, her position about truth-telling is inevitably more complex than her epigrammatic remarks allow, and it's instructive to read her response to *The Dolphin* in the context of the complete Bishop-Lowell correspondence. Lowell to Bishop, April 4, 1972, with uncharacteristic sternness: "Let me rephrase for myself your moral objections. It's the revelation (with documents?) of a wife wanting her husband not to leave her, and who does leave her. That's the trouble, not the mixture of truth and fiction. Fiction—no one would object if I said Lizzie [Hardwick] was wearing a purple and red dress, when it was yellow." Writing to Frank Bidart, who was by this time a close friend of both Lowell and Bishop, Lowell was even more brazen: "I've read and long thought on Elizabeth's letter. It's a kind of masterpiece of criticism, though her extreme paranoia (For God's sake don't repeat this) about revelation gives it a wildness. Most people will feel something of her doubts. The terrible thing isn't the mixing of fact and fiction, but the wife pleading to her husband to return—this backed by 'documents.'" Bidart argued that *The Dolphin* should not be altered, but Lowell did make changes in response to Bishop's objections: "Now the book must still be painful to Lizzie and won't

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satisfy Elizabeth," he concluded, aware that his disagreement with Bishop depended on a muddled conflation of aesthetic and moral values that, by its nature, could not possibly resolve itself.

The Bishop-Lowell correspondence describes and embodies this dilemma, this tension between reticence and revelation, a tension crucial to art that might otherwise be merely reticent or merely revelatory. But if the statement "*art just isn't worth that much*" is legitimately troubling, how does one justify the presence of painful revelations that are made not in the complicated arena of art but in casual correspondence, in letters or journals or e-mails? Does the statement "*letters just aren't worth that much*" carry the same charismatic weight? Should it? From the beginning of her friendship with Lowell, the otherwise reticent Bishop often wrote about their mutual friends in hurtful ways. That's inevitable; anyone might do so. But not everyone expects their letters to be purchased by a library. By complaining about people she also loved, however accurately, Bishop participated in a grown-up version of an age-old playground ritual: she established Lowell and herself as an exclusive club—two people who, whatever their other affiliations, stand together on the highest pinnacle.

Wallace Stevens tossed his manuscripts in the trash. Henry James built a bonfire in the garden. T.S. Eliot's most intimate correspondence (hundreds of letters written to Emily Hale) is sequestered at the Princeton University library until October 12, 2019, the fiftieth anniversary of Hale's death. *Words in Air* is a sad, fascinating book by two great artists, but it is much easier to read than a book of poems, and a lot less gratifying. It will sell more copies than most books of poems.

How much are letters worth? The recipient of a letter owns the letter, though the writer owns its extractable content. When Lowell sold his archive to Harvard University, he arranged for Bishop to be compensated for her letters, even though she had no right to be; at first she demurred, but eventually she accepted the $5,000. Subsequently, Bishop's archive was sold to Vassar College (her alma mater) for $175,000. More precious than that is "Water," Lowell's poem about the awkward, mercurial day he and Bishop spent together in Maine in 1948, the day they wouldn't speak of:

> We wished our two souls
> might return like gulls
> to the rock. In the end,
> the water was too cold for us. ■

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An unknown artist's depiction of Marie Antoinette as she was taken to the guillotine on October 16, 1793

Bloodstained Ghosts

by RUTH SCURR

"Audacity! Yet more audacity! Always audacity—and France will be saved," declaimed the revolutionary George Danton as he urged patriot volunteers to fight in 1792. For subsequent French generations, this revolutionary inheritance has involved the intractable problem of disentangling virtue from treachery. Danton was a glamorous figure, honored two years after the Revolution's centenary with a handsome statue on the former site of his home on the Boulevard Saint-Germain. But he was also the hard-nosed man of violence who reportedly said of the prisoners massacred after the fall of Louis XVI, "Let them save themselves." Then there were other revolutionary figures, Maximilien Robespierre above all, who could not be rehabilitated or publicly honored but whose contribution to establishing the values of 1789—liberty, equality, fraternity—was undeniable. Pursuit of those values, infamously, led France to be governed by the Terror.

Robert Gildea ends *Children of the Revolution*, his erudite account of France's long nineteenth century, with another tableau of bloodshed—the First World War's legacy of a million and a half lives lost on the battlefields of France and Belgium in defense of the French Republic and French nation. Gildea's book shows the internecine struggle there had been in France throughout the nineteenth century to secure the Republic and unify the nation, an effort that would culminate in the monumental sacrifice demanded by the Great War. That so many young men were prepared to die for a vision of France that was relatively new, and essentially contested, is testimony to the deep complexities of patriotism and the nation-state. Gildea assembles a wealth of information—historical, political, cultural and economic—to elucidate the conundrum, without pretending to explain it away. It is impossible to interpret the slaughter of a million and a half people as a triumph in any setting, but Gildea shows unforgettably a national identity winning out against all odds. It's a lengthy, complex saga, but he manages to sustain enough buoyancy in his prose to allow it to be read from beginning to end with interest and pleasure.

Gildea maps five generations, passing the memory of the Revolution from father to son, mother to daughter. First, those born around 1760, who were participants or contemporary observers of events in 1789 and afterward; then, those born around 1800,

Children of the Revolution
The French, 1799–1914.
By Robert Gildea.
Harvard. 540 pp. $35.

Ruth Scurr teaches history and politics at Cambridge University. She is the author of Fatal Purity: Robespierre and the French Revolution.

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who had no memory of the Revolution but whose childhoods were shaped in its immediate aftermath; those born around 1830, whose childhoods witnessed the violent insurrection of June 1848; those born around 1860, who were children during the Franco-Prussian War and the Paris Commune in 1870–71; and finally, those born in 1890, destined, in all too many cases, to die young in no man's land. Taken together, these five overlapping generations witnessed the collapse of the age-old Bourbon French monarchy, the establishment and failure of the First Republic, the rise and fall of Napoleon as emperor, the short-lived restoration of the monarchy, the Second Republic, the Second Empire and the Third Republic.

During the nineteenth century, religion remained a divisive force in French revolutionary politics.

There is an almost dizzying quantity of facts and fine details in *Children of the Revolution*, but this is a reflection of the frantic and unstable times Gildea sets out to cover. The ex-Jacobin Pierre-Louis Roederer (part of the first of Gildea's generations) once boasted that he had been present for the last night of Louis XVI's reign and for the first night of Napoleon's. Political careers of any longevity were an exception that weathered the dramatic regime changes as best they could. More typical were myriad brief brushes with power and office that ended, if not in death by guillotine, then in obscurity.

Beginning in 1799, when 30-year-old Napoleon Bonaparte returned to Paris from his campaigns in Syria and Egypt, Gildea briefly sketches the coup that brought the future emperor to power over the embattled First Republic. The Abbé Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès, who had played such a prominent part in 1789, was crucial again in 1799, still dreaming of a viable Constitution with a modern representative republican government at its core. But this "veteran republican politician" was double-crossed and finally bought off with a large estate outside Versailles, "which he accepted at the cost of his credibility." This judgment, in passing, is harsh. When asked what he had done during the Revolution, Sieyès famously replied, "*J'ai vécu*" (I survived). If he retired, in his dotage, to a comfortable estate after recognizing the indomitable force that was Napoleon, who can blame him? He had devoted his life to trying, imaginatively harder than anyone, to theorize an effective republic for France, and in the long run his contribution to modern political theory has been duly recognized. In the short run France succumbed to Napoleon: the Senate offered him a hereditary imperial title on May 18, 1804, a constitutional change, Gildea explains, "endorsed by plebiscite, with 2.5 million voting in favour and a mere 1,400 against."

One of the considerable strengths of *Children of the Revolution* is Gildea's eye for an individual example, anecdote or aphorism, combined with his comprehensive knowledge of the literature of nineteenth-century France. The writer Chateaubriand, who lost his mother to the Terror, wrote *Genius of Christianity* as a "mausoleum" to her and as a beacon to the postrevolutionary generation seeking a route back to "God's house." When he returned to France from exile in Britain in 1800, Chateaubriand found "only abandoned churches, whose dead had been thrown out, bell-towers without bells, cemeteries without crosses, statues of saints without heads, stoned in their niches." Chateaubriand claimed that when Napoleon fell from power in 1814, the emperor said that *Genius of Christianity*, published in 1802, had done more to undermine him than any other book. "The alliance of Church and state, throne and altar, was never closer than under Charles X," Gildea argues. The restored Bourbon heir, and last monarch of the senior Bourbon line, reigned from May 20, 1824, until the Revolution of 1830. The 1830 Revolution, Gildea suggests, "posed the question of whether Catholicism could ally with liberty," just as the 1848 Revolution "posed that of the alliance of Catholicism and democracy." Throughout the nineteenth century, religion remained as centrally divisive to French revolutionary politics as it had been since 1789. Ernest Renan makes a fascinating appearance in Gildea's narrative, having left the Catholic Church in 1845 and been appointed professor of Hebrew at the Collège de France in 1861, where he "saw his first lecture course suspended because he denied the divinity of Christ. The lectures were a foretaste of his *Life of Jesus*, published in 1863." This biography of the historical Jesus, who came "from the ranks of the people" and was "in some senses an anarchist," inspired a millenarian sect and sold 50,000 copies in six months.

The convoluted development of French feminism is another trajectory traced in this rich tapestry of a book. Gildea gives a strong account of Madame de Staël's novel *Delphine*, published in 1802, explaining that it was originally to be called *Le Malheur d'être femme*, but this title had already been appropriated for the French translation of Mary Wollstonecraft's *The Wrongs of Woman*. Divorce by mutual consent had been introduced during the Revolution by a law of September 20, 1792, but it did not survive the First Empire; it was revoked by a law of May 8, 1816, "which provided only for legal separation, allowing spouses to live apart and property to be divided, but prohibiting remarriage." Gildea reports the chilling fact that "spinsterhood was said to predispose to madness in the nineteenth century and half the patients confined in Paris's Salpêtrière hospital as mad in 1838–48 were unmarried." After the advances of the Revolution had been undone, the safe way to be a spinster was still to become a nun (the path followed by Madame de Staël's Delphine). Gildea finds a poignant example of frustrated female ambition in Renan's sister, Henriette, who kept house for him and followed him on his expedition to Syria in 1860–61, where she copied out and annotated drafts of his *Life of Jesus* before dying of malaria. In a later age, Gildea comments, she would have been an academic herself, but instead her enduring accolade is Renan's dedication of his book "to the pure soul of my sister Henriette."

The socialist philosopher Pierre-Joseph Proudhon emerges especially badly from Gildea's story of the reversals in feminist fortunes in nineteenth-century France. "Housewife or courtesan, I see no middle way," he announced in 1846 (better not to dignify this contribution with the term "argument"). But there was worse to come. In *La Pornocratie ou les femmes des temps modernes*, Proudhon suggested that women's brains are smaller than men's and that "all women who dream of emancipation lose, ipso facto, a healthy soul, a lucid mind and the virginity of the heart" (whatever that is). Proudhon died in 1865, but it was his revolutionary teachings that the Paris Chamber of Workers' Unions followed when it joined the Paris federation of the International in time for the Revolution and Commune of 1870–71.

Gildea takes this year as pivotal, the midpoint of the long nineteenth century in France: "Between the high summer of 1870 and the late spring of 1871 France suffered a series of interrelated crises which all but undid the work of rebuilding the country that had taken place over seven decades since 1799." France was at war with Prussia, the Second Empire collapsed, the Third Republic had to try to establish itself while German forces occupied northern France and Paris was besieged. "Let the lion of 1792 draw itself up and bristle," Victor Hugo urged in rhetoric reminiscent of Danton's. "Let us make war day and night, war

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in the mountains, war on the plains, war in the forests." But for all Hugo's incantatory eloquence, 1870 was not a rerun of the war effort that had rescued the Revolution in 1792. Dismayed by what he saw of the occupation in northern France, Gustave Flaubert wrote to George Sand, "I do not know how I am not dead, I have suffered so much for the last six weeks." He wrote again after the failure of the Paris Commune, which cost the lives of some 20,000 Parisians:

> The smell of bodies disgusts me less than the miasmas of egoism breathed from every mouth. The sight of ruins is nothing compared to the immense Parisian stupidity. One half of the population wants to strangle the other, and the other has the same desire. You can read it in the eyes of the passers-by.

France, by now, was supposed to be a modern democracy, and yet revolutionary violence had broken out again, as it had during the Terror in 1793. The government had relinquished control of the capital, Alsace and Lorraine were lost, and other provinces were striving to recover their independence. After all the claims of "France, one and indivisible," that there had been since 1789, nothing seemed further from the truth almost a hundred years on.

Victor Hugo's 1874 novel *Quatre-vingt-treize* was set in the Vendée in 1793, and as Gildea writes, it "celebrated the 'ideal republic' that showed mercy against the 'absolute republic' committed to destroying its enemies." In reality, the ideal republic was still far off. Gildea identifies a turning point in the slow moderate republican ascent to power in the "town hall revolution" of January 1878. These elections "swept republicans into the *mairies* of thousands of towns and villages. Since mayors were the bedrock of the colleges that elected senators, republicans gained a majority in the Senate in the elections of January 1879." This, as Gildea argues, was only the beginning. To ensure the stability of the Third Republic, there would need to be an established republican ruling class. Accordingly, the republican candidates devoted enormous amounts of time and money to cultivating their contacts and constituencies. But still there was no lasting peace between the moderate and radical republicans. Socialists formed an important minority on the Paris municipal council, which made its commitment to the memory of the Revolution evident in 1883 by unveiling on the Place de la République a statue capped by a Phrygian bonnet. In 1887 the council commissioned the statue of Danton, a year after Alphonse Aulard became the first incumbent of the chair in the history of the French Revolution at the Sorbonne. Like Danton, who after the Terror claimed to see in his dreams the bloodied victims of the prison massacres shaking their gory locks at him, nineteenth-century France remained haunted by bloodstained ghosts.

The remaining decade of the nineteenth century saw an explosion of French anti-Semitism in the Dreyfus Affair. Gildea presents this notoriously convoluted and consequential episode as further evidence of the political and cultural struggle to unify France. The writer Émile Zola led the way in denouncing a cover-up in the court-martialing of a Jewish officer from Alsace, Captain Dreyfus, for allegedly passing French military secrets to the German army. Zola was supported by Anatole France and Marcel Proust, among other intellectuals and writers. "Once again it is up to us poets," Zola wrote to Madame Dreyfus, "to nail the guilty to the eternal pillory." Support for Dreyfus led to the foundation of the Ligue des Droits de l'Homme, which continued the fight for recognition of the rights of Jews and all others who had been persecuted before the Revolution of 1789 and were still being threatened by injustice as the nineteenth century drew to its close.

Children of the Revolution, like Graham Robb's recent *The Discovery of France*, emphasizes the regional diversity and disunity that existed before the Revolution of 1789 and continued far into nineteenth-century France, despite the state's best efforts at centralization. This preoccupation with centralization is not a fad in recent historiography. It has been pivotal to the study of France at least since de Tocqueville's time. What Gildea, like Robb, brings to the problem is a willingness to broaden his focus from the high politics and rhetoric of regime change to the nation's wider cultural and literary life. He quotes Renan's Sorbonne lecture of 1882:

> A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. This is made up of two things which are really only one. One in the past, the other in the present. One is the collective ownership of a rich legacy of memories, the other is the present consent or desire to live together, the will to continue to develop the inheritance it has received intact.... The nation, like the individual, is the culmination of a long past of striving, sacrifice and dedication.

Gildea's book is a substantial contribution to understanding the individual nation that is France. ■

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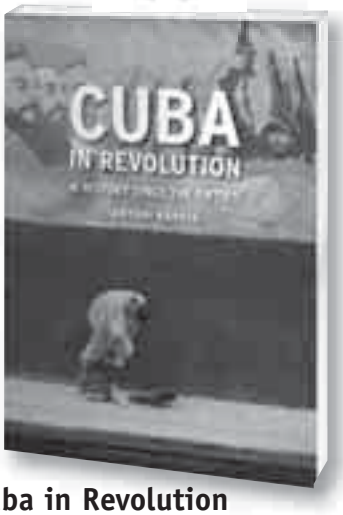

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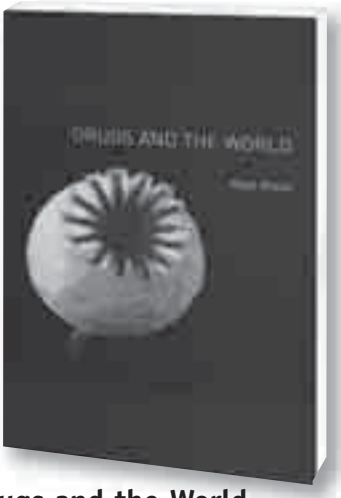

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Unreal City

by BENJAMIN LYTAL

The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge
By Rainer Maria Rilke.
Translated by Burton Pike.
Dalkey Archive. 198 pp. $13.95.

Those who read it young remember a flickering phantasmagoria, a sequence of real and surreal scenes reflected on the inner waters of the poet's imagination. Even the title of Rainer Maria Rilke's only novel, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, published in 1910, suggests an actual notebook, a reservoir of images meant for use in poems. Malte Brigge's great themes are the same as Rilke's, and Malte's attempts to think them through can seem tentative, like so many rope ladders flung up into empty air. But the great poetry cycles that Rilke completed a decade later, the *Duino Elegies* and *Sonnets to Orpheus*, circle around their themes in like manner, not tapering straight toward a point but blocking out the massive slopes that, each in turn, seem to foreshorten the peak of a very real, solid mountain. Despite appearances, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* is highly structured, and upon careful reading becomes, definitively, a novel.

The Notebooks comes from the epicenter of Modernism, discordant and fragmentary. And its reactions to the contradictions of its moment, like those of many other works of romantic spleen, could uncharitably be called overreactions. Its famous set pieces of urban alienation come early. Young Malte, arrived in Paris at age 28, wants to test his sense of vocation against the city. Like many young writers, he may have confused being a poet with being a Parisian. "I am learning to see," he assures himself, though his identity crisis as an urban newcomer gets in the way. His vision is physical; he claims that it bounces back from the pavements and shop windows and breaks open new spaces within him. But when he tries to describe what he sees, Malte projects his angst onto the men and women around him. He sees multitudes every day; the crowds shock him, and he begins to find in their faces signs not only of urban wear and tear but of uncertainty. Each person, he perceives, has several faces. Because he is a poet, he makes his metaphor literal, observing that "there are people who wear the same face for years; naturally it wears out, gets dirty, splits at the seams, stretches like gloves worn during a long journey." Other people put on a new face every day, using them up, until they realize in the middle of life that they have wasted their beauty. So the axis of urban misery is stretched between the cheerless *passants* and the decadent *flâneurs*.

Sketches like these can be enjoyed on their own, framed by their jotted criticality and containing Rilke's signature imagery. At moments, Malte the confused youth shifts into Rilke the mature writer. A painting by Hieronymus Bosch becomes, in Malte's description, pure Rilke: "Things meant for limited and ordinary uses stretch out and stroke one another, lewd and curious, quivering in the random lechery of distraction. Those kettles that walk around steaming, those pistons that start to think, and the indolent funnel that squeezes into a hole for its pleasure." In one famous scene, Malte observes the bare remaining wall of a torn-down tenement, its wallpaper still showing, discolored by the open channel of the old toilet pipe. The life of the vanished tenants persists vividly on these walls, but once again, Malte animates his metaphor and makes it come to life:

> The stubborn life of these rooms had not let itself be trampled out. It was still there; it clung to the nails that were left, stood on the narrow remnant of flooring, crouched under the corner beams where a bit of interior still remained.... It was in every flayed strip of surface; it was in the damp blisters on the lower edges of the wallpaper; it fluttered in the torn-off shreds, and oozed from the foul stains which had appeared long before.

Though he notices all this, Malte claims he ran away from the wall instantly, horrified.

For the wall is not only a set piece but an increment in the dramatic arc of *The Notebooks*. Malte is stoking himself, fanning his fear—his angsty description of "viscous" crowds, a page later, is a telltale indulgence, the mark of an immature poet. Not that Malte is a ham—Rilke makes him repeat himself occasionally, as if paranoid, and works in ample detail of the poet's very real poverty. Yet each section of *The Notebooks* must be taken not just as a fictional diary but as an artistic effort designed by its fictional writer to solve some emotional problem and reach some height of beauty and insight. He makes this explicit once, early on. Noting that "one

Benjamin Lytal has written for the Los Angeles Times, The Believer *and* Bookforum.

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must take some action against fear," he writes a short, luminous story about the heroic death of his grandfather and declares afterward with satisfaction that "I have taken some action against fear. I sat up all night and wrote; now I am as tired as after a long walk through the fields of Ulsgaard."

Ulsgaard was Malte's paternal estate. The destitute poet was once the child of the Danish aristocracy, and beginning with this anecdote, his memories of an almost medieval childhood compete for space with the concrete of Paris. Malte's grandfather, Chamberlain Christoph Detlev Brigge, died not in battle but in bed. In bed he was a volcano, swelling in death so much that he had to be moved onto the floor, where a voice no one had heard before erupted. He howled through the night for two months, becoming notorious in the vicinity, so that the villagers who once admired him began calling him "the Terrible." This is a tall tale, but Malte writes it as if awed. He is comforted by the greatness of this "princely death," which he juxtaposes to the deaths mass-produced in a modern hospital. In the preindustrial past, "you had your death *inside* you as a fruit has its core."

Humane it may be, but this elevation of the past is buttressed by an almost medieval nostalgia, recalling the sentiments of more overtly reactionary Modernists like T.S. Eliot. The first half of *The Notebooks* culminates in a visit to the Musée de Cluny in Paris. Malte describes the tapestries in loving detail, noting the postures of the lady with the unicorn and the attendant animals, and concludes with satisfaction that these tapestries are a static ideal: "Everything is here. Everything forever."

What arrests Malte is the enduring stillness of the tapestries, so contrary to his roving, animating eye. It is sometimes intrusive, endowing objects with uncanny life; translators of Rilke's prose must follow its lead and similarly endow Rilke's images in ways that may seem inappropriate to the purist. With Burton Pike's scholarly new translation of *The Notebooks*, it becomes apparent that Stephen Mitchell's definitive translation of 1982 took liberties in order to bring Rilke to life in English.

Pike argues that Rilke's prose "is not smooth," and though he doesn't make explicit claims against Mitchell, it must be Mitchell he has in mind when he writes, "It would be a mistake to translate [Rilke's] German into a smoothed-over literary English." In the first surreal moment of *The Notebooks*, on the first page, Mitchell has: "The street began to give off smells from all sides." Pike copies the German word for word, changing only the word order: "The street began to smell from all sides." Pike's clipped translation surprises.

Strictness about word-for-word equivalence, and tense, saves Pike from some of Mitchell's more inventive moments. When a thought occurs to Malte in a haunting, spooky way, Pike has: "It touched me almost spectrally." This is awkward, but there is no good equivalent for the German adverb "*gespenstisch*." Mitchell solves the problem another way, conjuring up a ghost on his own credit: "There was a thought which kept making my hair stand on end, as if I had been tapped on the shoulder by a ghost."

Yet Pike's loyalty to the German too often captures not the essential weirdness of Rilke's prose but the relative weirdness of German syntax to English ears. When Pike translates "*Gesicht ist Gesicht*" as "face is face," he adds a barking quality to what should be a matter-of-fact phrase. Mitchell's "A face is a face" retains the bluntness of the original—he is always willing to add words that will keep Rilke fluid in English. And when Rilke's prose defies perfect translation, Mitchell consistently finds his way into persuasive English. Malte's meditation on faces eventually leads him down an empty street. Here's Pike: "The street was too empty, its emptiness got bored and pulled my foot out from under and flipped it back and forth, this way and that, like a wooden shoe." And here's Mitchell: "The street was

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too empty; its emptiness had gotten bored and pulled my steps out from under my feet and clattered around in them, all over the street, as if they were wooden clogs."

The upshot of this imagery is that a woman, slumped at the other end of the street, sits up startled, accidentally leaving her face where it lay, in her hands. This makes sense only if we understand that Malte's footsteps, in the emptiness, have echoed up and down the street.

It is Rilke's hyperanimate imagery, with all of its moving parts, that ties his language in knots, and the achievement of Mitchell's admittedly smooth translation has been to retie those knots, in English that holds. In the long warp of the novel, Mitchell serves Rilke better. Though Pike's differences with Mitchell are instructive, Pike does not supplant him.

The tapestries that hung so self-sufficiently at the end of part one of the novel become a backdrop for social criticism in part two. Malte seems to be merely historicizing them at first, noting that these tapestries used to hang in a private house, among the descendants of the fifteenth-century knight who commissioned them. But then he turns and notices that there are girls in the museum, modern girls with sketch pads who, like the tapestries, have moved out of the old houses and now live independently, with no one to fasten the backs of their dresses. These aristocratic girls dimly recognize that the lady in the tapestry represents everything that would have been theirs if family and religion and feminine passivity were still triumphant.

There is something about old legends of unrequited love that encourages Malte, the straining poet. His idols are lovelorn women who finally transcend their man—women whose "torment suddenly turned into a bitter, icy magnificence, which nothing could confine." When Malte hit rock bottom in Paris, he developed a similar theory about beggars: that, like saints, they are attended by angels in their seclusion. Suffering perhaps, in his urban alienation, from delusions of grandeur, Malte champions the hermetic genius—whether it be a charismatic beggar, or Beethoven in his deaf isolation, or some Avignonese pope.

Everything Malte does, dredging up old legends, could be read as a relentless comparison between the European present and the European past. The city disappoints, its hospitals dehumanize, its streets harrow the sensitive poet. He casts himself back to the dust-clogged halls of Ulsgaard. He buries his imagination in the old costume closet and in his mother's lap. It is typical of Malte that his metaphor for men's neglect of women figures a scrap of fine lace that lies wrinkled among a boy's broken toys.

Rilke fetishizes the past, to be sure. In 1963 Elizabeth Hardwick lamented in the inaugural issue of *The New York Review of Books* that Rilke's model of life, "Art as religion…the austere dedication, sustained by the hope that poems and novels would save us," was passing from New York City. ("From patience, at last," Hardwick continued, sounding a bit like Malte, "they had perfection. And a security, a fringe benefit, a pension fund such as one can hardly imagine nowadays.") But Rilke was always passing on. His sense of the past was creative, nutritive and eccentric. Some critics read the historical scenes of *The Notebooks* as filler or, in dramatic terms, as writing exercises on Malte's part. Childhood ghosts and stories of knights—and a mad king who pressed an amulet to his chest so steadily that a purulent indentation opened in his flesh—puffed out from a diseased imagination. Because he no longer owns an inherited house, Malte complains that "I have no roof over me" and grouches that "my old furniture is rotting in the barn where I left it." He could seem spoiled.

But Rilke ends the book with a long retelling of the parable of the prodigal son, and the moral of his story is not that the prodigal son was spoiled. Malte in fact applauds the prodigal son, speculating that he left home because he did not want to be loved, and that he did not want to be loved because he wanted to achieve something higher. One of the darkest obscurities of *The Notebooks* is the question of how Malte came to Paris penniless. We learn that his family sold their house and moved to Copenhagen, but the rest goes unexplained. Malte's sympathy for the prodigal son shines backward to encompass the modern girls, alone in the Musée de Cluny, and even the homeless beggars and saints of his most fevered notions. All these strive together, in Malte's sense of history and in his language of solitary work.

About the prodigal son: "I see his whole existence, which was then beginning its long love toward God, that silent work undertaken without thought of ever reaching its goal." About the young girls and their forebears: "Over the centuries they have taken upon themselves the entire task of love." About himself, the poet contemplating the beggar: "I had undertaken the task of imagining him, and was sweating from the effort. For I had to make him as you make a dead man, who has lost all the proofs and all the constituent parts of his existence, who has to be achieved entirely within you." Even the ghosts who, ironically, enliven the quiet halls of his childhood, seem to quiver with the effort of their vigil.

Love and death are the two themes, the twin heights, that command *The Notebooks*. Looking back over the bulging, gathered solidity of Malte's efforts, we can discern a mind that is anything but spoiled. The Chamberlain's overbearing death, which grew in him like a fruit, resembles the unrequited love—and in the case of the prodigal son, the something beyond love—that flies past its target, with nothing to stop it. Ripeness is not all: it is too much; it never quits. Even dumb objects are bursting with kinetic potential. The lovelorn ghosts have outgrown their lives. Malte regrets the way he grew up, the abnormality. He tries to accommodate himself to the city. It is an effort.

Reading *The Notebooks*, it is important to remember which half Rilke made up. He had lived and suffered in Paris, from 1902 to 1910, while researching a biography of Rodin and pursuing other projects. But he was not Danish, and his family was not nearly as noble as the Brigges. He invented all this romance, not to show up modern Paris but to delve back, to find room to plant himself for the leap into a future that he so doubtfully contemplated. ■

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Mathieu Amalric as Henri in *A Christmas Tale*

The Dread of Failure

by STUART KLAWANS

We make time: by flirting or declaring a break, by observing holidays or arranging the passing moments into music and theater. And time is always ready to unmake us. Maybe death comes in due season—with the fullness of time—or maybe it strikes like a Shakespearean tyrant, sending us off without reason or warning.

All these types of making and undoing—celebratory and mournful, measured and arbitrary, fleshly and fanciful—get gloriously mixed together within the running time of Arnaud Desplechin's *A Christmas Tale*. You settle in for the duration: a very fluid two and a half hours, in the course of which no fewer than a dozen characters will take turns commanding your attention. They are members of a middle-class French family, gathered in a typically drab industrial city for their typically fractious holiday reunion; but given the surrounding atmosphere, you might almost see them as goddesses and queens, wood nymphs and bedazzled wanderers. A phantom wolf prowls the house; a fabled monster threatens to burn up the mother; and a snatch of music, running from scene to scene, tells you the world's been turned upside down. The Vuillard children have come home from Paris in late December, but the soundtrack keeps playing *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Surely the parents of this clan, like an ill-matched Titania and Oberon, could have been united only by magic. The father (Jean-Paul Roussillon) is squat, croaking, rheumy-eyed, blubber-lipped, and labors under the doomed name of Abel. But somehow, though by trade he dyes fabrics, his métier is to radiate wisdom and delight. Somehow, though accurately self-described as "an old toad," he enjoys marriage to a golden beauty, who bears the divine name of Junon and the form of Catherine Deneuve.

She is a fallible deity, as are most mothers in their children's minds. When first seen, fixing a tea tray in her house in Roubaix, she taps shut a cabinet with her hip, as would any mortal in her kitchen, and then precipitates the plot by falling down. But after her vulnerability has been diagnosed—an aggressive cancer, treatable only on a dare—Junon resumes her serene imperiousness. Perhaps she will allow one of her offspring to prove worthy of her by donating bone marrow for a transplant. "It's not done," her oncologist protests, on strictly medical grounds. (He doesn't know this is going to be a competition.) Junon shrugs off the objection. She gave life to her children, she says. Why shouldn't one of them give life to her?

She is clearly not a goddess of the self-sacrificing kind; and if her reasoning seems topsy-turvy, it's no more irrational than her brood. The most conventional of her children is the youngest, Ivan (Melvil Poupaud), who packs liquor bottles in his pockets, boasts of his history of madness and maintains a less-than-bourgeois career as a turntable artist. At first glance, this lean and handsome blade with the buzz-cut head and dashing wardrobe is an orchestrator of mischief. (He's the one who shows up at Christmas with the box of fireworks.) But it's all bluster. Soon enough you realize that Ivan is a homebody, wholeheartedly devoted to his glowing wife (Chiara Mastroianni) and two small sons.

More successful than Ivan, but more troubled, is Junon's eldest child, Elizabeth (Anne Consigny), a playwright with a string of well-received productions to her credit and a husband (Hippolyte Girardot) who is a fine-looking, world-renowned mathematician. You'd think all should be well with her; but she makes her first appearance in the film in her psychiatrist's office, pouring out a complaint about sterility, rage and endless mourning. Why has this pale and delicate woman, still lovely in her 40s, retreated inward? Why does her every statement sound like an accusation, her every gesture come accompanied by a suppressed tremor? "Why do you hate your brother?" asks the analyst.

Which brings us to the middle child, Henri (Mathieu Amalric), the one who's a mess both inside and out. In passing, you learn that he manages to hold down a job at an auction house. Mostly, though, he devotes his energy to sarcasm, recklessness, obscenity, financial malfeasance and public drunkenness—none of which is adequate to explain why Elizabeth suddenly had him banished (her exact word) from the family. That was five years ago; ever since, Henri has been able to meet Ivan and Abel only haphazardly, on the sly. He hasn't seen his nephews at all (and now can't even recognize them); and of course he's been denied the right to come to Roubaix for Christmas. For what crime is this the punishment? "I feel as if I'm living in a myth, and I don't know which one," Henri says in one scene, speaking directly to a camera that dollies in until you're looking at an extreme close-up of his vulpine face. The eyes are so deep and brown, they seem dilated even under the cinematographer's lamps.

Three grown children, one of whom might be compatible with Junon and offer her the transplant that could save her life, or just as likely kill her. (The treatment is potentially fatal.) As for her fourth child, Joseph: he can do nothing, because he too was a cancer patient, who died as a boy, forty years ago. He did not get a transplant; no one was compatible. For the en-

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tire Vuillard family, this was the founding catastrophe. And yet, at the funeral, Abel spoke of it in his own upside-down way: "Joseph has made me his son—and I am filled with joy."

I tell you all this, and still I haven't gotten past the movie's prologue.

It takes about half an hour of screen time, until everyone gets packed into the house, for *A Christmas Tale* to reveal its nature fully: expansive in narrative scheme, compact in emotional space and self-consciously auteurist to the core. Here are the actors who have served as Desplechin's stock company over the years; here is his hometown; and here are the themes and motifs he's identified as his own. Professional moviegoers can tick them off their Desplechin list, beginning with mental instability, parental rejection and life-threatening illness, followed by Jews, antic misbehavior, intellectual fencing and echoes of great stories of the past. The sense that the film is full to overflowing is yet another of these authorial markers. You can think of them as guides to an experience created by a strong artistic personality; or you can ask to what degree they have now become sales handles, used to promote an established product. "A film by Arnaud Desplechin": signature or brand?

The question comes to mind because *A Christmas Tale* is less breakneck than *Kings and Queen*, less unforeseeable than *Esther Kahn*, less disputatious (I guess that's the word) than *My Sex Life…or How I Got Into an Argument*. There's less risk-taking in it and more of an impression that a masterful filmmaker is permitting himself liberties—including the right to resolve the story perfunctorily, literally with a coin toss. (Talk about flippancy.) I excuse everything on the grounds that Desplechin is exercising a self-assurance he's earned. Suspicious minds might be forgiven, though, if they note how *A Christmas Tale* positions itself not just within Desplechin's career but within a known commercial enterprise. It evokes the marketable memory of Jean Renoir. It brings out an A list of French performers. It offers viewers the comfort of a moneyed and cultured milieu and (as a house-party movie) the prospect of somebody's getting laid. It is, in short, a prestige production, worthy of France's tradition of quality.

But a little perspective: the telltale films in that maligned tradition, the ones that François Truffaut savaged as a "certain tendency in French cinema," were in the sneering and reductive strain known as psychological realism. Desplechin practices psychoanalytic realism, which is not at all the same. His characters, creatures of unknown depths and mythical underpinnings, are always bigger than their circumstances—Abel, for example, is livelier and more profound than any aging dye merchant needs to be. And the circumstances resist explanation, in the manner of dreams that loop back on themselves. Elizabeth, sister of the Vuillard family's lost boy, has another potentially lost boy on her hands in her teenage son Paul (Emile Berling), who takes antipsychotics and has an affinity for knives. Henri, son of a terrifyingly candid mother, comes back to Roubaix with the ferocious Faunia (Emmanuelle Devos), a terrifyingly candid girlfriend.

Desplechin's characters are creatures of unknown depths and mythical underpinnings.

These uncanny doublings and reversals, make of them what you will, keep rushing at you; and so do the formal elements of *A Christmas Tale*, which have their own too-muchness. The soundtrack is more barrage than collage, blasting through and across scenes with a mix of Mendelssohn, Gershwin, Mingus, "Merry Christmas, Baby," you name it. The camera placements and editing are done on an anything-goes basis, quickly tossing at you three or four different views of a character in medium close-up and then finishing the series by dizzyingly dropping back fifty yards. The décor of the house in Roubaix (once you get to it) is thick with family photos and children's paintings—of course—but it is also layered with half-glimpsed books and newspaper clippings and record album covers, all of which seem like clues you don't have time to decipher. Yes, Desplechin has reached the stage where he can throw all this together without evidence of strain; but as much as ever, he is staggered by the possibility of what it might mean.

Some artists suggest answers. Desplechin gives a range of responses between rational calculation and irrational desire; and it's characteristic that he does so most explicitly in *A Christmas Tale* in a brief lecture about time. It's one of the movie's most improbably thrilling scenes, in which Elizabeth's husband, the math wizard, shows how to figure Junon's prognosis for survival along a continuous time scale, with values from zero years to infinity. The catch, he explains, is that Junon can either accept or reject the dangerous treatment, but she cannot refuse to make a choice. "You're already in the game," he says gently. "You have to play."

So do we all, every moment of our lives; but we rarely make the time so beautiful.

I wish my deadline had allowed me to praise *Synecdoche, New York* a few weeks ago, before the picture opened, because a gloomy premonition tells me you won't have a chance to see it much longer. That's all right, I suppose—because *Synecdoche, New York* is nothing but one long, gloomy premonition. It's an excursion into the depths of guilt and regret for moviegoers who find Yom Kippur too airy, a comedy of the sort that Woody Allen might have made if he really were depressed. The night I watched it, one out of three paying customers fled for the exits. The rest of us sat rapt before the genuinely awful truth.

As the first film to be directed by screenwriter Charlie Kaufman, *Synecdoche, New York* is unrestrained in expressing its author's multifaceted dread of failure, as experienced by a character trapped in worlds within worlds. You've seen this situation in *Being John Malkovich*, *Adaptation* and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*; and now you see it with Philip Seymour Hoffman playing a less-than-minor theater director in Schenectady. As the story begins, he is already obsessed with age and illness, in despair over the triumphs he hasn't achieved, dismayed at how quickly time passes. And at this point, he's still in early middle age, still putting shows before an audience and still living with his wife (Catherine Keener) and daughter. He doesn't know how good he's got it. Soon the losses and humiliations begin to pile up in fantastic measure, and time's cantering becomes a full gallop, until he responds by attempting a *Gesamtkunstwerk*. He reproduces his life, and everything that surrounds it, as a never-ending theatrical rehearsal within a huge warehouse. For the average world-encompassing genius, this would be a self-aggrandizing gesture. For him, it just shrinks his scope of action smaller and smaller.

Brilliantly imagined and perfectly performed, *Synecdoche, New York* is so heartbroken and strange that it can be compared only to other Charlie Kaufman films—or, perhaps, to a Sci Fi Channel version of Henry James's *The Beast in the Jungle*. I mean that as a compliment and urge you to see it, if you can. The odds are two to one you'll stay. ■

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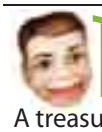

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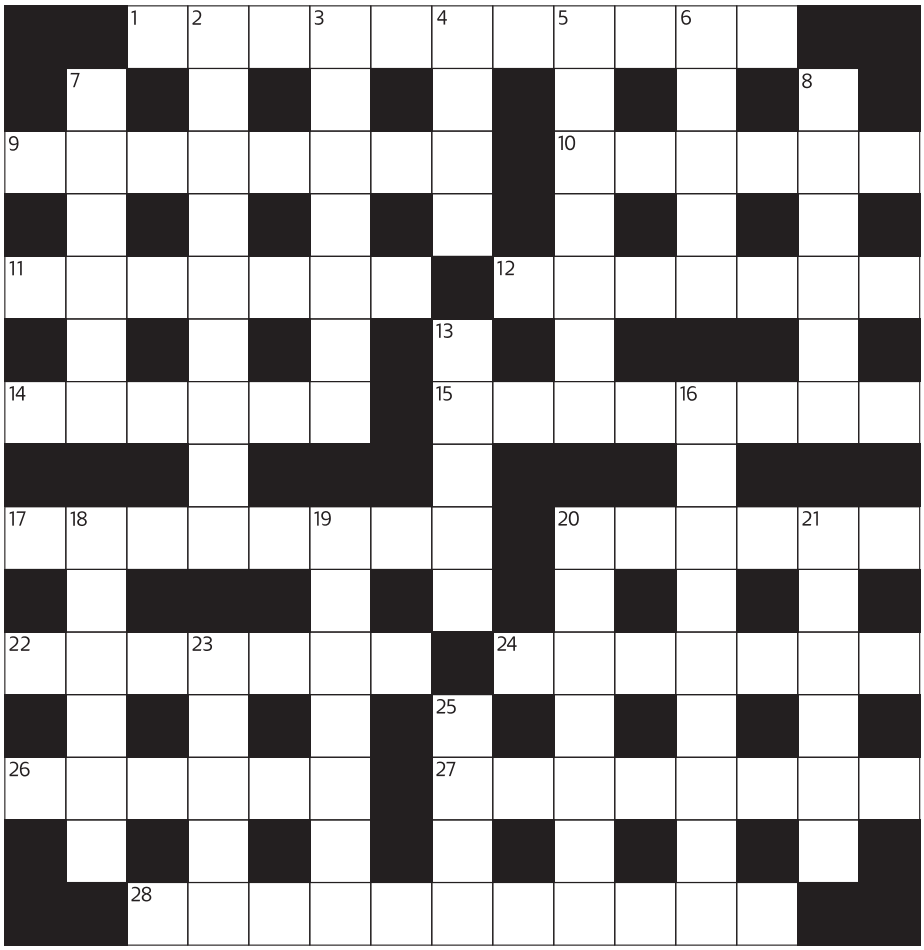

ACROSS

1 Pa's companion and her little boy only got little Edward, being rather poorly adapted to the situation. (11)

9 Chalcedony obtained with fake coin, causing derision. (8)

10 Certainly not an exit ramp, but one of those damaging things you hope you don't find. (6)

11 The jazzman's hat comes back to a famously wild auntie—really wild—causing a situation where you have to make a difficult choice. (7)

12 Almost all crazy, crazy, in a female ruler. (7)

14 What we might be told to listen to are not quite right, young feller! (6)

15 Urgent work the tailor might be doing. (8)

17 Happy to take ten to the little city of angels—and get a flower, possibly. (8)

20 Time spent at the end of a sentence, usually. (6)

22 In the thick of things, being a little state surrounded by a great deal of worry. (7)

24 Like the cattle standing in Oklahoma, it sounds like you might be in the country shortly. (7)

26 Game where you get something you might have to cross. (6)

27 They're usually not wasted on the quick type. (8)

28 Here weapons are assembled for a military command. (7,4)

DOWN

2 What the crowd was at Gettysburg shows what letters may be. (9)

3 Article about little creature reveals the old Roman's fourth name. (7)

4 What some call money for John, more properly. (4)

5 Stick in the drink! (7)

6 One of the Bard's comedies has a lot of such, which is wrong. (5)

7 The lady of 1 across has something she didn't want in her hair, which causes bad feelings. (6)

8 What's the point in ecclesiastical law? It could cause a lot of noise! (6)

13 Possibly parts of little fish. (5)

16 A layer having a precious stone, possibly—but it might be just a ploy. (9)

18 They spend their nights in Madagascar, when the French raise their spirits, singularly, inside it. (6)

19 The boy's terseness shows what superstition tells us not to dine with at certain times. (7)

20 Show affection for the Cinders girl, but you might bend it in proposals. (7)

21 Write a bad piece of poetry around it, hoping the letter will be. (6)

23 A point on the celestial sphere shows what could be a bad drain to you. (5)

25 Have a tendency to be a bit skinny? (4)

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B	L	O	C	K	■	A	N	D	T	A	C	K	L	E
O	■	P	■	N	■	C	■	W	■	L	■	I	■	A
O	U	T	P	O	S	T	■	I	N	S	I	D	E	R
N	■	I	■	T	■	S	■	N	■	O	■	D	■	L
D	O	M	E	■	L	O	A	D	S	■	T	I	N	Y
O	■	U	■	C	■	U	■	L	■	A	■	N	■	■
C	O	M	E	O	U	T	■	E	N	G	A	G	E	S
K	■	■	■	B	■	■	■	■	■	A	■	■	■	T
S	C	A	R	R	E	D	■	T	R	I	P	P	E	R
■	■	B	■	A	■	E	■	I	■	N	■	R	■	A
D	O	R	A	■	U	M	B	E	R	■	D	O	W	N
U	■	A	■	C	■	E	■	S	■	G	■	V	■	G
C	O	H	O	R	T	S	■	T	W	O	T	I	M	E
K	■	A	■	O	■	N	■	H	■	N	■	D	■	S
S	O	M	E	W	H	E	R	E	■	G	U	E	S	T

The Nation (ISSN 0027-8378) is published weekly (except for the second week in January, and biweekly the third week of July through the second week of September) by The Nation Company, L.P. © 2008 in the U.S.A. by The Nation Company, L.P., 33 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003. (212) 209-5400. Washington Bureau: Suite 308, 110 Maryland Avenue N.E., Washington, DC 20002. (202) 546-2239. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Subscription orders, changes of address and all subscription inquiries: The Nation, PO Box 55149, Boulder, CO 80322-5149, or call 1-800-333-8536. Publications Mail Agreement No: 40041477. Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to Bleuchip International, PO Box 25542, London, ON N6C 6B2. Canada Post: Publications Mail Agreement No.: 40612608. When ordering a subscription, please allow 4-6 weeks for receipt of your first issue and for all subscription transactions. Basic annual subscription price: $52 for 47 issues. Back issues $6 prepaid ($8 foreign) from: The Nation, 33 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003. The Nation is available on microfilm from: University Microfilms, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. Member, Audit Bureau of Circulations. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Nation, PO Box 55149, Boulder, CO 80322-5149. Printed in U.S.A. on recycled paper.

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REBUILD AFTER METH

The headlines about methamphetamine—meth—have been grim. This highly addictive drug leaves a path of destruction that hurts families and entire communities. Users suffer severe health consequences; children are often neglected; and communities face dangerous crime and overburdened law enforcement.

Are we making strides in the fight against meth? Absolutely. From first responders to substance abuse professionals, those who work on the frontlines to combat meth recognize the progress.

There is still work to be done, however — from eradicating meth production and distribution to helping those battling addiction. Consider Teresa. She is a mother, Girl Scout volunteer, and website developer. Her life took a sharp turn when she started using meth to lose weight. Her story went from bad to worse as she abandoned her family, including her 4-year-old daughter, for nearly a year in the search for her next high. She eventually entered a treatment program and made a commitment to conquer her addiction. Today, she is drug-free and a leader in anti-meth efforts in her community. There are thousands of people like Teresa out there, showing individuals and communities what they need to know.

Each year, nearly 150,000 people are admitted to treatment for methamphetamine.[5] And outcomes for meth users entering treatment are comparable to those for users of other similar drugs.[6] Find out about substance abuse treatment, and support meth treatment in your community.

- ***Meth use among youth and young adults has declined significantly since 2002.***[1]
- ***More meth users are seeking help. Meth treatment admissions have more than tripled in the past decade.***[2]
- ***And law enforcement officials are finding fewer and fewer domestic meth labs—meth lab seizures in the U.S. have decreased dramatically since 2004.***[3]

- ***Treatment is available, and it works.***
- ***Drug addiction treatment is cost-effective—for every $1 invested in drug treatment programs, there is a $12 savings in crime and health care costs.***[4]

Learn more at methresources.gov or call 1-800-662-HELP.

American Society of Addiction Medicine
Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA)
National Association of Addiction Treatment Providers
NAADAC, Association for Addiction Professionals
National Association of Counties
National Association of Social Workers
National Conference of State Legislatures
National Drug Enforcement Officers Association
National Narcotics Officers' Association Coalition
The Partnership for a Drug-Free America
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
State Associations of Addiction Services

[1]SAMHSA, Office of Applied Studies, National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), 2002-2006, Table 8.40B.
[2]SAMHSA, Office of Applied Studies, Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS) 2007, Table 1b.
[3]DOJ, National Drug Intelligence Center, National Methamphetamine Threat Assessment 2008, December 2007.
[4]National Institute on Drug Abuse, "Principles of Drug Addiction Treatment: A Research-Based Guide," 2000.
[5]SAMHSA, Office of Applied Studies, Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS) 2007, Table 1a.
[6]National Institute on Drug Abuse, "Principles of Drug Addiction Treatment: A Research-Based Guide," 2000.

Office of National Drug Control Policy

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